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by

D. R. King

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SASKATCHEWAN

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CHAPTER ONE

Two streamers of mist slipped between the rigging of the little ship as she ploughed carefully through the fog. The sun, high above at midday, showed only a dull orange disk. At the rail the boy spoke to his mother, eyes fixed on the fog ahead :

"Where is Canada now, Mother?" He took a step higher on the rail.

"It's there in the fog. You mustn't worry, it's a very big country and we won't miss it. As soon as the fog lifts we'll see it. Soon now we'll be in Montreal."

"What is Montreal like, Mother? Are there Indians there?"

"Oh, I should think there are Indians there, Teddy, but they are nice Indians. Montreal is a big town. Father says it is growing bigger every day, and soon may be as great as Liverpool or Glasgow."

Silence reigned for a moment as the boy shifted his thoughts. Then :

"What does Father look like, Mother? I always forget."

"Teddy lad, you've asked me that a hundred times this last while. It's so long since he left us, isn't it? Three years! Three years is a long time for a wee boy. But it won't be much longer now. You'll know your father before your next birthday. Aye, before summer. You'll be twelve years old next month, Teddy, almost a man." She sighed quietly.

"Then I'll be able to help Father on our farm, won't I?"

And help him hunt, and trap beavers and fight Indians and——”

“Teddy, Teddy! Your father says we won’t have the farm for some time yet. And I doubt if the factor will let you go out hunting with the men. Or trapping either. And as for fighting Indians, your father writes us all the time how friendly the natives are around the Factory, and wouldn’t think of fighting anybody, let alone little boys. You must wait until you are a few years older, I’m afraid.”

“But Mother, I’m almost twelve years old now. You just said I was almost a man. I’ll be a real hunter, you’ll see. I’ll trap lots of beavers and shoot all kinds of animals. I’ll learn to paddle a canoe. Father said he’d teach me, didn’t he? And I’ll——”

The boy’s outburst was drowned out in a great cloud of mist that poured about them on a fresh, cold wind. From the mast high above came the long clear chant: “Ahoy the de-e-e-ck! Iceberg! Iceberg ho!” And immediately the voice of the captain through his megaphone:

“Where awa-a-ay?” The lookout’s reply was swept away by another gust but the last part of his message came through to them.

“. . . the starboard bow. And another one! Ice! We’re heading into ice! ——”

A few minutes later, like a curtain going up, the fog lifted. In the sudden silence that followed, not a man, passenger or seaman, could fail to see the terrible dangers surrounding them. The sea for miles around, now, was a mass of jumbled, broken cakes of ice. Chunks of all sizes drifted towards them and past them. Only to the rear was there open water, where the loose ice was fast filling in the long trail of the wake. The ship slowed quickly as she ploughed

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into the ice, but a more somber note was heard on the wind. Over the drumming of the floes striking the wooden hull came the rising whine of wind. "Call all hands!" bellowed the captain, reading those disaster-hidden clouds, sounding out the sea and the wind. "Lively, boys! Haul in that canvas. Stow all gear. Batten the hatches." Then, almost as an afterthought, "All passengers below deck, on the double."

And even as he spoke the wind struck the ship like a huge fist, heeling her far over so that the passengers were forced to crawl along the decks and cling to rails and ropes in their efforts to get below to safety. The ship exploded in a fury of activity as all sailors, on and off duty, ran to their tasks. Not a man aboard but knew the seriousness of the situation. A squall, coming up while the ship was in the middle of an ice pack, meant only one thing—disaster! Unless every man aboard did his job and did it quickly and willingly, they might all go down.

As the wind rose in fury, the ship began to rock more and more violently, pitching with each gust, and the shock of ice crashing against her hull sent shivers of fear through every sailor. Every shred of canvas was stripped from her masts and furl'd as tightly as possible before the freezing might of wind could get a chance to tear it off. Gear and freight were lashed securely to stanchions, rails, or whatever was solid and handy enough for the purpose. Lines were strung across the decks so that hurrying seamen might have something to grasp when the ship bucked suddenly and sent them sprawling. Within minutes of striking, the gale had coated everything topside with a hard white mantle of ice. In order to work the gear it became necessary to chop the ice away with axes before lines would run

through blocks. Rigging and woodwork were as one. In a short time even the clothing of the seamen became hard with frost. Fingers that were usually nimble and supple became stiff and numb, and the simplest tasks meant hours of agonizing work for the crew. And yet they toiled on through wind and darkness. Sea and sky were blotted out by the raging clouds, and when night came it made little difference.

Down in the darkness below the decks, where only the creak of timbers and swaying of the decks betrayed the fight of the ship, the passengers huddled in frightened silence. Of the total passenger list, eight were men, clerks bound for posts with the Hudson's Bay Company. Thirteen women and seven children, wives and families of men already serving the Company in Canada, were bound for Montreal, there to take their separate ways to rejoin husbands and fathers long waiting their arrival. And how long the waiting had been! First the years, until permission could be obtained for their emigration. Then the months, while suitable accommodation was arranged for them; then the weeks of privation and misery aboard the tiny ship as she fought her way across the early spring seas, heading across an endless ocean to reach a port nobody had ever seen. Montreal! Once a fortress of the enemy, now capital of the vast trading empire of the Honourable Company. And as if the rigours of waiting and travelling were not enough, the passage itself became a trial of terror for some. Though the mothers urged their children to walk on deck at every opportunity, many of the women became dreadfully seasick and chose to remain in their bunks below for the entire voyage. There were a few passengers, including Mrs. James MacDonnell, who were able to stand

the bite of the early spring days to take the air on deck.

Now as the entire company squatted fearfully in the long common room, they were mostly silent save for a few who moaned unending prayers for salvation and deliverance. Many, who had scarcely left their bunks the entire voyage, crept miserably back into them.

And still the ship plunged on ahead of the driving storm. Hour after hour she drove helpless before the monster's dying attack. Below decks a few slept fitfully. Over in the corner a child cried out in hunger. Several others joined it in a chorus. In their own space, Teddy clutched his mother's hand tightly, not so much for his own sake as to comfort her. They spoke little, and then only in whispers lest they wake some poor soul who had managed finally to drop into exhausted sleep.

Through the thin planking of the hull they felt rather than heard each blow dealt the ship. The sound of large pieces of ice striking the vessel was deafening as it echoed through the hollow holds. Gradually, to the listening ears, the crashes and bumps grew louder, more violent, and more frequent. Suddenly the whole ship rocked sickeningly and the air was filled with the awful noises of timbers crashing and screaming as they were smashed to kindling. On their feet, wide awake in the instant, the passengers grabbed for children and possessions, and raising their voices in a chorus of despair, rushed screaming for the steps.

Even as they fought their way up to the deck, the way was cleared for them. Burly seamen threw open doors and hauled men and women and children out onto the heaving deck. Those who were unable to walk were carried bodily to the open air, and as the passengers milled around in

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frightened misery, the seamen began their immense struggle to save the ship.

The berg they had struck was not a large one, but it had holed them severely below the waterline. Pumps were ordered into action with all hands standing by as relief. The male passengers joined the crew in this attempt to keep the angry seas from filling the vessel. The iceberg lay astern now. They were moving very slowly through the ice pack under a small spread of canvas. In their wake, the only clear lane on the water, the berg slowly rotated, bobbing gendy through the swells.

Then from the throats of the children came a cry of joy. Ahead lay not the ice fields, or bergs or storm clouds, but clear open water. They were through! A murmuring cheer went up from all watchers, for in the dim light of morning, low and black on the horizon, rose the headlands of the new land. Canada! And though it was still far distant, though this was but the rocky island around which they must sail to reach the St. Lawrence River, it was the finest sight ever seen. Hearts lightened, hopes soared, and a group of women began a hymn of thanksgiving.

But even as this promised land hove in sight, the ship began to settle. Though the pumps were being worked at top speed they could not stop the flow of the ocean into the little vessel. With a last hope, the captain cracked on all sail, giving at the same time the command:

"Prepare to abandon ship!"

As the water crept higher and higher up the side, the three whaleboats were swung over and made ready. Provisions were loaded and the first group of passengers climbed aboard. With perfect timing the sailors dropped the little boat into the water and cast her loose. So with

the second boat, and soon the two were bouncing side by side on the open ocean, light lines still holding them fast to the mother ship. But suddenly a last fitful squall threw the ship violently against the boats. Number two boat, the one in which Teddy and his mother were seated, was upended and capsized.

Almost before they touched the water, the victims were seized and hoisted aboard the first boat by brawny arms of male passengers and the crew members in charge.

Dripping, shivering in her place in the boat, Mrs. MacDonnell reached out to grasp her son. He was not beside her. She searched each face for that of her child. He was not in the boat, and the boat was even now pulling away from the ship.

"My son!" her anguished cry shrilled across the waters. "My wee laddie!" She rose suddenly to her feet. "Where is Teddy?"

"Easy, ma'am," urged a grimy sailor, catching her arm and drawing her down to her place again, "Take it gentle, you'll overturn us."

"But I've lost my boy! I've lost my bairn!" screamed the struggling mother.

"Aye, perhaps you've lost him," replied the sailor sympathetically, "but if you don't keep still you'll lose the rest of us too." Whereupon the poor lady sank heartbroken into her seat.

A soft voice spoke in her ear. "I saw the boy, ma'am. He were pulled onto t' ship. He's safe, he is. They'll get him off in the other boat when the sailors go. He's safe, you'll see."

At that moment the fog rolled down and caught them once more, settling over them like a blanket, hiding boat

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from ship and even ship from sea. And hidden by the fog was the sight of the entire crew, plus a wet, miserable little boy, standing on the sloping deck of the ship staring at a very large hole in the bottom of the remaining boat on deck. An overhanging ice cake had cut their last line to safety.

CHAPTER TWO

JAMES MACDONNELL laid his paddle across the gunwales of the long freight canoe and looked back up the river. Behind, in a long wavering, bobbing line, slipped the rest of the brigade, twelve big northern canoes with several slow, ugly York boats bringing up the rear a mile upstream. Expertly balancing in the choppy waters, MacDonnell drew himself to a careful standing position as he stared into the fog ahead. His action seemed to release a spring in the arms of the paddlers, sixteen in each canoe, for every driving stroke increased in length and strength until the heavily laden craft almost flew over the water. Every man in the flotilla kept his eyes upon the dim shoreline ahead, watching for any and every landmark that could be recognized. Not a word passed between the canoes now, or even among the crews. Each member of the brigade held his breath, excitement bubbling inside him, for within an hour they would be home again. The voyageur is like a child at such times, and the simple pleasure of seeing old friends is all that he desires from life at the end of the long journey.

Horne 'After months of work and hardship' Horne with friends and families. And for James MacDonnell, captain of this brigade, it would be even better. For three years he had served this outpost on the great Hudson's Bay. Three years of loneliness and waiting, three years of travelling across the wide reaches of this new country in search of furs, the trappers' gold. Three years of waiting for the day

when permission would be granted, and provision for his wife and son could be made at the post. And at last they were here! At least, they *should* be here, waiting for him. The last dispatch reaching Fort Edmonton had mentioned that his family were given passage in the early spring, which meant they should even now be at York Factory. They would be waiting for the brigade when it arrived. They would be there to welcome him, and everything would be wonderful.

For some minutes they sped downstream in silence, save for the slap of water on the bark of their canoe. They were nearing the Bay now, for here the current was broken by small waves that swept a little way upstream. Only the steady "chunk-chunk" of the paddles broke the morning stillness. Then, in the leading canoe, James MacDonnell stood upright and raised his paddle above his head. His long drawn-out bellow echoed from the trees along the shore:

"York ahoy! York Factory! We're home, lads!" and the whole forest quivered with the mighty cheer that went up from a hundred throats. Someone in the middle of the party struck up a song, and with the first words paddles dug deeper and thrust harder, making the canoes jump forward, leaving the York boats to plod along far to the rear.

"En roulant ma boule, roulant,
En roulant ma boule!
Derrière chez nous y a t'un étang,
En roulant ma boule!"

A few minutes more brought them within sight of the landing. Shouting out their song, straining eyes for sight

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of loved ones, they hurriedly straightened sashes and jackets, donned that morning with special care, for all voyageurs must be dashing and brightly dressed on the day of homecoming.

Even before the flotilla could be seen from the shore, their song rolled from rocks and trees, booming on the still, clear air of the forest. The people of the fort stopped whatever tasks they were at and ran for the landing. The factor heard it through the glass of his residence window. The clerks in the long accounting room dropped their pens and trooped to the door. The Indians heard it in the woods around, and the boys in the fields came running helter-skelter, for everybody goes down to the landing when a brigade comes home.

For one whole year these men had been away. For twelve months they had roamed the vast prairies and waterways of the great northland, some almost right up to the fabled mountains. Far up the Nelson River, across the great lake of Winnipegosis, and hundreds of miles up the Saskatchewan River into the land known only as Assiniboina, they had travelled, searching for the sources of wealth that fed the flow of precious furs into the Company's posts. And now they were home with a fortune in pelts, longing to rest a while with families and friends before the next adventure into the great unknown land.

As they approached York Factory, the boatmen eagerly searched the crowd along the shore and landing for the first sight of beloved faces, and the most eager of all was James MacDonnell. His eyes swept back and forth over the gathering throng. Here and there he could pick out from among the black hair of Indians and half-breeds the blond

or brown head of a clerk's wife, but none of them the bright face he was seeking. From the fort issued a small party of men, gentlemen to be sure, resplendent in full dress; and at their head the factor, no less. Thus worthy gentleman strode grandly down the road to water's edge, where he waited for the canoes to arrive. Everywhere was the flurry and colour of celebration, bright shirts and sashes of the men, flaming headscarves and brilliant dresses of the women, and over them all, fluttering sulkily below the red-white-and-blue of the Union Jack, hung the ensign of the Hudson's Bay Company.

Even before the voyageurs turned the canoes and headed across stream towards the rough landing, the air was filled with glad shouts, loud laughter and merry voices as old friends and husbands and wives cried out their greeting across the water. Many willing hands were there to grasp the gunwales of each canoe as it slid up to the beach. Before those aboard could spring out, the canoes were hauled far up the bank above waterline and hands were extended for shaking, backs drummed under vigorous pounding and slapping.

Foremost at the waterline stood the factor, eyes on men, boats, cargoes and James MacDonnell all at once. MacDonnell stepped quickly from his canoe and went to meet his chief. The two shook hands formally, then turned to walk into the post. The first few words were quite business-like.

"Good trip, James?"

"Very good, sir."

James felt rather annoyed with the factor. Why did he not tell him news of his family? The question died on the tip of his tongue as his chief said, in a low voice, "I've had

word of your wife and boy, James. They're supposed to have left Liverpool three months ago. I sent word to you at Edmonton."

"Aye, sir. I got your dispatch. But what further of them? Have you heard nothing more?"

"Nothing!" replied the factor. "And that's what puzzles me. Dispatches are slow to reach this post, I know, but if she had reached Montreal we would have had a runner by now. I can't understand it. However, we'll hope the supply ship is only late. Try not to worry too much, lad. No news is good news, as the saying goes."

"Ayt, no news is good news, it's true. But I'll not get much sleep until she's here safe." James broke off then, and changed the subject back to business. "I'll make out my report immediately, sir. There's not much new. Just a good trip. Plenty of furs to be had up that way, though. I should think we could stand a few more posts out on the plains. I understand much of the fur trade is going south into America."

"I've heard that, James. And I think you'll find the Company is going to do something about it soon. Well, get some rest and I'll expect you at the ball tonight. We've quite a few new people here since you left. There should be entertainment well worth the seeing. The report can wait until tomorrow!"

"Thank you, sir. I'll be there." MacDonnell, heart heavy, walked slowly into his quarters for a chance to be alone with his thoughts.

The day after the ball at the residence, the *Prince* came in. This valiant little vessel formed part of the only supply line between the Company's head office at Montreal and

her far-flung outposts along the Bay. This day she carried more than supplies and mail.

James was interrupted at his writing by a knock at the door.

"Who is it?" he called irritably.

"The runner, sor. The factor wants you in his office immediately, sor. He's waiting fer-r-r ye the noo," came the burred accent of the Scottish messenger.

"Tell him I'll be richt wi' him," James burred back in his broadest Scotch, teasing the other. The messenger's footsteps clicked away along the hard path.

MacDonnell hurriedly finished his dressing and followed. Across the compound he walked briskly, halting to knock at the door of the residence. He was shown into the factor's private office. And there were several men with his chief, men he did not know.

"Ah, MacDonnell, I've a good reason for summoning you. But first, let me introduce these gentlemen. Mr. MacDonnell, Captain Jones of the *Prince*, Mr. James, first officer and Mr.——ah——"

"Simpson," finished the other, extending a hand. "No relation to the Governor."

"Sit down, gentlemen. Now James, I'd like the captain here to tell you what he has just told me. Captain——?"

"I was telling the factor about an incident that happened several months ago, Mr. MacDonnell. We were heading into Halifax around the Island, for the ice was still in the Strait. We came upon a derelict, or at least she was as near wrecked as could be without sinking. The crew was all in good health, had a napkin o' canvas up and were making headway towards land when we took them in tow.

"Seems they had hit a small berg off the Banks and

knocked a bit of a hole in her. They got two boats off, but one capsized, and the passengers—they were all immigrants comin' over from Liverpool—all of 'em were picked up by the other boat. All but one, it seems. He was pulled in to the ship, where the crew was trying to get the last boat off. Seems this one was smashed, though, but when the sea capsized the little boat, the ship rolled enough to lift her hole above water. She was half-full, but not sinkin', so the crew was headin' fer Halifax. Last they saw of the small boat, she was driftin' away fast in the fog.

"Well, we pulled her into Halifax, where she laid up for temporary repairs, and we took the lad—it was a boy was rescued—we took him on to Montreal. The captain of the other ship gave me papers and such saying he was bound for Montreal. Son of an agent of the Company, with his mother, headed for York, here. But his mother was pulled into the whaleboat, and it hasn't been picked up yet, they tell me. At any rate, seems as it's your boy we've got, Mr. MacDonnell, and I'm sorry about your wife. But don't worry, God'll see her safe ashore."

MacDonnell had gone deathly white at this news, and now he shook his head as though he could not quite understand the situation. "Jeannie?" he muttered, to no one in particular, "My wee Jeannie, lost at sea. There's been no report of her since?"

The captain shook his head, "None. But it's probable she's been picked up by some fisher boat out from Newfie. They may have taken the survivors back to some little fisher village on the Island. There's places there don't touch the outside for months at a time. Probably they've got these people there waitin' 'till they've recovered some before they take 'em in to St. John's. She'll be all right, Mr. Mac-

MacDonnell, you'll see. Now then, where'll we take the boy?"

"The boy?" asked James, dazed still. "My boy? Wee Teddy? Why, to my quarters, of course. No, I'll take him there myself. Where is he?"

"Steady, son," came the soothing voice of the factor. "The lad's still aboard ship. He—he's been through a bit of rough weather lately, you know. He got wet when the boat turned over, and they had no dry bedding or food for several days, you know. The wee fellow came down pretty sick before they got him to Montreal. He's in a bunk under the care of the ship's doctor just now, but he can be carried on a litter if we have a proper place to take him."

"Proper place! An' do ye think my rooms not proper enough for my own son?" cried MacDonnell indignantly.

"Aye, I reckon it will be warm enough now that you're to be here for a while. He needs warmth and rest and constant attention," explained the captain. "I'll have our doctor give you instructions when he comes ashore. Now, Mr. MacDonnell, I'll take my leave. The boy will be brought ashore in the next lighter. I'm honoured to have met you, sir." The captain bowed slightly as he shook James's hand.

James rose slowly and walked outside into the sunshine. Jeannie gone! No trace of her yet! No word as to whether she was alive or dead. And no trace of her grave if she were dead. But now the boy was uppermost in his mind. Poor little fellow! What would he be, twelve years old now? Well, he would get all the care a loving father could bestow, James would make sure of that.

And later, when the still, white body was carried gently into his room, James listened carefully to the advice of the doctor. Good food, lots of rest, and time. Time enough for the wasted flesh and scarred mind to heal. Time to forget

the ordeal, and also to forget the great loss. In a few months, perhaps, the boy would be as well as ever. But more than likely, the doctor said, it would take many years of steady improvement before the lad could take an active part in life again. Possibly, and here the doctor's brow furrowed, just possibly he would be bed-ridden for the rest of his life. James buried his head in his hands at these words, but vowed he would do his best for the lad.

But sometimes doctors reckon without thought of the heart that beats within a tiny breast. When Teddy opened his eyes to see the silent, kneeling form of his father beside his bed, the lad's first thought was determination to live, to grow strong enough to comfort this man who shared his sorrow.

CHAPTER THREE

YORK FACTORY looked tiny and peaceful from the top of the hill. Ted watched the heat waves shimmer over the log buildings, watched the men slowly amble about their various jobs, watched as small bands of half-naked Indians wandered lazily from door to door or squatted in what shade they could find under the walls. Below him the great river widened to meet the great Bay Hudson's Bay! So great that it disappeared in the distance against the horizon. It reminded him of the ocean, where he had come so close to losing his life, and where he had lost his mother. His father said little about it now, but still he grieved, Ted could see that. But between them no word of their heartbreak was spoken. That had all passed during the long winter months after their reunion.

The boy thought back now, back to that first day almost a year ago. Before his twelfth birthday he had seen his father, just as Mother had promised him. And now it was close to his thirteenth. For weeks he had lain in his cot, growing steadily stronger under his father's faithful care and his own great will. Gradually he had wakened to the sounds of the fort, the calls of the traders and agents, the shuffling of many feet past his window. And to pass the time he had memorized the various footsteps of the post. He could always tell when a guard or trader thumped past by the tremor as heels bumped the hard ground. Clerks stepped briskly past in leather shoes, sometimes squeaking,



making a sharp slap-slap. The sound that aroused his interest most, though, was the soft swishing of buckskin as an Indian padded by. All these sounds, and others, came from outside the room.

He remembered how carefully and tenderly his father had cared for him. Nursing him back to health again, feeding him and keeping up the fire even on the coldest days. But oh, how the boy yearned to be free of the cabin! To get out in the air and the sun once more he would have given anything. His father seemed sometimes too kind, too good, never allowing a draft or breath of fresh breeze to enter the room. And so the lad had taken to creeping out of bed while his father was away, breathing deeply of the air, drinking in the sights greedily.

His thoughts of the past few months at the fort were interrupted by something that caught his eye far out on the Bay. For a minute he squinted at it in the glare of the sun.

"A ship!" he said, first to himself 'A ship' A ship!" And unable to contain his excitement he dashed headlong down the hill towards the post, crying at the top of his voice, "A ship, a ship-a ship-a-ship!"

Men working at the landing heard him and turned to follow his pointing finger. Indians rose from the shadows, women hustled from their wash-lines, clerks and agents peered pale faces through their doors to see what the fuss was about.

"A ship!" panted Ted, "I saw a ship coming in."

A workman pointed towards the water. "It is a ship!"

"Must be the *Eddystone*. She's in early this year"

More and more men and women and children joined the throng that gathered on the river bank. This was the life-line between the outpost and civilization. The little supply

ships brought fresh food, clothes, medicines, weapons, and, best of all, letters from home.

Slowly, very majestically, the little ship drew closer and closer, making for deep water directly in the river mouth. As she neared her anchorage those on the banks could clearly hear the rattle of gear and whine of ropes as sheets and halyards slackened, and the great grey canvas wings slatted in the breeze before the sweating sailors lashed them securely. With a gentle swaying motion the vessel coasted to a stop a few yards offshore, rocking easily in the calming waters. As all forward motion ceased there suddenly came a brittle command from the ship, followed immediately by the rattle and splash of the anchor running out and down. With this came another command, unheard by those on shore, causing a surge of movement on the ship. Boats were swung out and lowered, and the first one was filled with gaily dressed people. As this light craft pulled away from the ship, a great shout went up from the watchers. Caps were flung in the air, greetings and questions echoed from the ship's sides. Once again joy and good feeling filled the hearts of the people of the Factory.

Back in the shadows of the trees Ted leaned against a trunk and watched silently as the little boat pulled up alongside the wharf and two agile seamen sprang lightly out to hold it while their captain stepped safely ashore. Another boat pulled away from the ship, this one filled also with people—passengers, no doubt. Teddy felt his heart pound in anticipation, but it lasted only a moment. If the one he thought of was in the boat, they would have heard of it before now. He watched as a number of clumsy York boats left the landing and nosed out towards the ship to unload the supplies.

In the meantime the captain had advanced part way up the road to the gate, there to be met by the factor, hurriedly finishing buttoning up his coat, having dressed to receive his guest in a manner befitting the dignity of the Company. The second boat now reached land, and then the third. It was this one that Ted followed most closely. It carried the precious bags of mail. He trailed behind as it was unloaded and the bags were carried up into the fort. His father met him at the gate and together they silently went into the store, where the letters were sorted.

But no letter was there for them. James shook his head sadly. "Nothing, lad! Ah well, perhaps the next boat——" His words trailed off as he turned to his tasks.

That evening, as the two sat quietly in their quarters, there came a brisk knocking at the door

"Who is it?" called MacDonnell.

"Robbie!" came back the voice of the Scottish messenger. "I'm to tell ye thot ye're wanted in the factor's quarter-r-rs, Mister-r-r-r MacDonnell." But the gloom was on James at the moment and he forgot to give his usual teasing reply, answering only:

"Oh, aye. I'll be along in a moment." The runner waited a few seconds before he moved away.

"So!" the elder MacDonnell breathed as he stood up to put on a clean shirt and to button his waistcoat over it. "Well, lad, I'll be back soon" He drew on his coat. "So the factor wants to see me again. Teddy, suppose you put on the kettle and we'll have a cup of the fresh tea I'll bring back with me. Aye, lad?"

"Aye, Father." And the man was gone

When James entered the residence his chief was waiting.
"James, my lad, will you take a chair?"

James sat down. He looked at the bulky dispatch case on the desk and the lists and other papers that cluttered the office.

"No, no!" said the factor, following his glance. "I've no news of your wife, son. I'm sorry there isn't. But this is business. I've just received a dispatch from Montreal. You remember last year I told you the Company was thinking about all the furs they lost each year to the Americans? Well, orders have just come through. We're to send a brigade to Edmonton as usual, and another party is to travel along the foothills of the Rocky Mountains, south and east of Edmonton. Try to drum up a bit of trade there or at least encourage the natives to trade at our posts. The Chief wants me to pick a man to lead a party of—oh—say about three wagons and two or three agents, with a few friendly Indians to interpret. He told me to get the best man I know. I figure you're the man, James. Will you go?"

James thought quietly and quickly for a while. This was certainly a good chance. To take charge of an entire territory, new and practically unexplored, unmapped. Country where only a few white men had ever travelled extensively, where the Indians had not come to know the convenience of guns and steel knives and other trade items; where the buffalo in millions covered only a patch of the hundreds of thousands of miles of prairie. His answer showed a little of the ambition he felt.

"I'll go!"

Then the two went into a deep discussion as to the best times, best routes, and other plans for the venture.

"There isn't much beaver down that way," James remarked, "but the buffalo market can stand all we'll get. And they tell me there are more buffalo out there than

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there are fish in the Bay. We'll certainly need wagons."

"Right! We'll send as many wagons as you think necessary. They can return to Edmonton whenever they're full. Should be pretty easy going out there, I should think. The reports say it's pretty dry in that country and no trees. They say there are some spots on the rivers where it might be possible to build posts. That's part of your job, locating the best places, where the Indians camp."

"Good enough. But what about the trade goods? Have we got enough here or will we have to wait for another ship? The Indians out that way haven't had much in the way of real trade experience yet. They still use the old flintlocks and some other kinds of muzzle-loaders mostly. What about whiskey out there? They would probably go for that."

"Aye. They'd go for it all right, but the Company has stopped all trade in whiskey now. Those plains tribes go crazy over the stuff. With whiskey and the new guns in there, there would really be trouble. No, I think we had better stick to standard trade stock, powder and ball and such. No more call for it around here so we've got quite a bit on hand. Let's get rid of all the muzzle-loading guns and the powder and shot while we've got the chance. And they need a lot of knives and axes out there too, I understand. This rush on buffalo hides ought to last a while now we're making coats out of 'em in the Old Country and around Montreal. Kind of puts beaver in the background a bit. Well, now how about a route?"

"Well, sir." MacDonnell pointed to the fort as it was marked on a wall map. "I've been thinking about that. If we go directly to Edmonton by our water route, then trek south, we would only have a few hundred miles of prairie

to cover. But if we hit west from Fort Garry we've got three times as far to go overland. Take all our supplies just to get there. I think we had better work out of Edmonton. That way we can supply the line from our regular brigades up the Saskatchewan. The trip won't be hard between Edmonton and the border, and we can run in to the fort if we hit any trouble."

"Aye, that's sound reasoning, lad. Fort Edmonton it is. As soon as you can get the brigade made up. That suit you all right, James?"

"Suits me fine, sir. I'll start first thing in the morning. We should be ready to leave by the end of the week. By the way, sir, can I choose my own men for this trip? To stay with me on the prairies?"

"Take any man you want, and as many as you need. This is an important venture for the Company and it must succeed."

They parted then, each bent on his own duties. Then followed hours of counting and weighing supplies, checking costs, wages, men, and all the little items necessary to clear the way for a journey to the west. There was the drawing from stores of gear, trade goods, sacks of pemmican, bags of flour, boxes of tea, and bales of blankets. And there was the personal equipment of each man to account for.

Within the week everything was in readiness for their departure. Men had been hired, outfitted, and allotted stations in the canoes; some Cree Indians, with an occasional Blackfoot, took their places as interpreters. But one person was not busy at the job of packing, even though he was to go. Ted found many opportunities these last few days to avoid his father's eye and protecting hand, and

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slip through the gates into the forest. The air, the sun, the exercise were beginning to take effect, for each day spent outside made a difference. In his own way the boy was getting ready for the trip, preparing himself physically for the long, hard trip a thousand miles westward across the great lone land.

CHAPTER FOUR

For some reason the forest was very still today. As Ted lay silently on his stomach in the bush, peering out through its leafy screen, there was no trouble listening for the footsteps he expected. A little to the left, about ten yards distant, was the watering-place at river's edge. Here the animals came to drink, and here also came the boy, every day possible, to lie and watch.

Sometimes he grew tired before anything came along, but more often than not he went home to the fort glowing with enchantment. If the day did not measure up to his full expectations, at least he never returned disappointed. Almost every day deer wandered slowly along the trail which led close by his hiding-place. Very often a bear would follow, or a lone grey wolf, on the track of the deer. Or if there were no large animals about at that time of day, then the lad satisfied his curiosity by watching the smaller life. There were the beavers at their woodcutting, and playfully scampering squirrels, and sometimes a dry rustling announced the passage of a big yellow porcupine. In the air jays gossiped back and forth in flight, and other small birds sang, whistled, or screeched through the whole day.

Usually the forest was alive with their calls, but today the voices of the woods were muted. Perhaps it was just that he was learning to shut out the sounds for which he was not listening. At any rate it was not long before he heard the thump and swish of his bear as it lumbered

heavily along the path. Somehow he could feel her footfalls just as clearly as he heard them, and over the steady pad of the adult animal he heard the quicker, erratic scuffle of tiny paws. The cubs were still with her! And then around the corner and into his sight they came, the old one moving slowly along, huge head swinging from side to side, the youngsters gambolling under and about her. At any particularly appetizing bunch of berries or leaves she would stop to lick off a mouthful, then continue on toward the river.

Their course led them within a few feet of the boy's hiding-place. Oh, he thought, if only his mother were here with him! How much she would enjoy this scene! Well, that was behind him now. In a little while he would be on his way across the far reaches of the north country, headed for the outpost of Fort Edmonton.

Ted lay quietly with his thoughts, dreaming of the hour they would set out for the northwest. He thought of the big freight canoes even now being readied for their journey to Edmonton. What a grand name! Almost Scottish, almost like home, the one he had left so long ago. Fort Edmonton! But how far it must be! Hundreds and hundreds of miles through the wilderness, his father had told him. Miles of forest and rivers, rivers so broad one could scarcely see across them. Forests so high and dense that the sun never reached the ground among them. And all this country alive with game—moose and elk and bear, beaver, otter, muskrat—everything. Ted sighed, shivering a little at the thought.

While the lad dreamed beside the forest trail, men at the post were busy. The brigade was making up for the trip to

Edmonton. James MacDonnell stood by the jetty, watching carefully as the twenty huge freight canoes were inspected and repaired. With greatest care he ticked off his list the piles of trade goods, camping gear, massive packs already made up for portaging, sacks of pemmican, tea, tobacco both for trading and for the use of the men. By morning they would be ready. By this time tomorrow they would be westward bound. Westward into the wilds of Assiniboua.

Sadly James remembered his wife. Well, after this trip was finished he would be due for a bit of leave. He would take the boy and go to Montreal to try to trace the lost boat. MacDonnell scribbled a few more notes on his sheet and turned away from the canoes.

And not far away, in the deep woods, a weary figure stumbled along the trail. Wet and shivering from his recent swim across the river, he picked up the shore path and trotted steadily along downstream in the direction of the fort, all the while muttering gruff, mild curses about water in general and a certain river in particular. As he sped along on silent feet his ears were tuned automatically for any sound of danger. His eyes roved ceaselessly about the trees ahead. In the gloom of the forest he could make out the trail some distance ahead, where it sloped down gently to a watering-place or something. What he failed to see was the other trail branching off at right angles into the forest, and also he failed to hear the soft clumping of the bear as she shuffled toward the junction of the two trails.

It would be difficult to say which was more surprised, man or beast, when they almost ran into each other. For one frightened moment the runner, so close he could touch

her, stared at the bear, at the cubs which even now were scurrying for shelter. Then he made a dive for the nearest tree.

Back in the forest, Ted's thoughts were rudely interrupted by a sudden snort of anger from the waterhole. Parting the bushes, he looked quickly up and down the path before he discovered the reason. There at the edge of the river stood the she-bear and her cubs. What they faced in anger was the next object of the boy's attention. Clinging helplessly in the highest branches of a swaying tree was a man.

As Ted watched entranced, the bear stood up. She rose slowly to a standing position on her hind legs, front paws waving menacingly. Then she waddled ponderously to the base of the tree, wrapped her huge forepaws about it and began to climb. But the tree was small and slender, and as the great bear moved upwards, it began to bend, and she had trouble hanging on to the trunk. Giving up this tactic, she dropped to the ground and glared at her prey with little red pig-eyes. Then, rising up again on her hind legs, she wrapped her paws around the tree once more and began to shake it with all her four hundred pounds, making it whip back and forth like a willow switch. The victim of her anger slipped down a foot or so, letting out a great howl in an attempt to frighten his attacker.

Ted drew back into the bushes and very quietly got to his feet. Bent double, he crept out of his blind and through the brush beside the trail. In a few moments he stood directly behind the furious bear. True to her nature, in her anger at the man, she had momentarily forgotten her cubs. At his first glance the boy had realized that here was the

chance to divert her attention from the man in the tree. In a burst of energy he flashed out of the thicket, scooped up the cub squatting nearest him and taking a few short steps to the river bank, tossed the squalling bundle of fur as far as he could. Then, without stopping, the boy headed for the nearest tree.

As the cub let out his first bawl of fright, the mother turned. For just a moment she hesitated, uncertain as to what was going on, undetermined as to whether or not she should attack this new enemy. But as soon as the little fellow struck the water with a great splash, she made up her mind. Her family came first. She lunged over the bank after the cub, splashing water high and far as she hit the surface heavily, going completely under at first, then rising and striking out strongly downstream to where her offspring struggled noisily. The second cub, abandoned, went after them, slithering and bounding along the river trail to keep up with them. For a moment longer the two humans kept to their treetops, but when it became certain that the bears would emerge from the river some distance away, they both began the journey to the ground.

Ted reached ground first, and ran over to where the other was just picking up his rifle from where he had dropped it. The stranger was a small man, completely dressed in fringed buckskins, brown as an Indian, but wearing the gay crimson *assumption* sash which marked the professional woodsman.

"By gar, leetle fren', you come jus' in de right time, I t'enk," he grinned at Ted with tobacco-stained teeth, at the same time holding out his hand. "You save de life ol' Coiteau. You wan good fellow, ou?"

Ted held out his hand in return, saying proudly, "My

name's Theodore MacDonnell. Maybe you've heard of my father?"

"MacDonnell? Jeem MacDonnell, de agent? Nom de nom, do I know heem? T'ree time I'm go wit' heem on de brigade. We go to Fort Edmonton togedder once, too. We are like dis—heem an' me." He held up two fingers close together. "An' so you are hees leetle wan, eh? By gar, I'm t'eenk he got good man here." The two turned to walk back up the trail. "T'odore? Dat's too hard name for ol' Cortneau to say. I call you Ted. You like dat, oui?"

"Oh yea, I like it much better than Teddy. What's your first name?" The man laid his arm across the boy's shoulders as they walked.

"Dey call me René, my fren's."

"Oh, and can I call you René too, like we were friends?"

"But yes, leetle wan, I would be ver' angree eff you deed not call me like de ol' fren'. Remember, you have jus' save my life."

"Well, I guess we were lucky. Are you a *coureur*?"

"Oui, leetle sparrow. Ol' René, he ees de bes' courieur in de whole nort' wood. You ask you' papa. He tell you so. I bet he be pretty glad for see me today, eh boy?"

"Why, I guess so, Mr. ——René. We're almost ready to leave for Fort Edmonton, though, so I don't suppose he'll have much time to spend with you. But if you like, I can show you all around and——"

"Ho ho, dat's pretty good joke, I t'eenk. I tell yo' some-t'eeeng, leetle fren'. I spen' much time wit' Jeem MacDonnell from now on. Dat's why I'm here, me. You' papa, he ees send for me to come from Nelson an' join de brigade." By this time they were approaching the fort. At the gate they met the older MacDonnell, sleeves rolled, notebook in

hand, coming to finish the packing.

"René, you old French devil!" cried James, grasping the Canadian's hand in both of his.

"You see, leetle wan," grinned Cortean to Ted, giving the hands a terrific pump, "you see at w'at nice name he call me? Ol' Jeem MacDonnell, he ees my partner, dat's plenty true, eh Jeem?"

"Plenty true!" laughed MacDonnell, and the two began slapping and pounding each other on back and shoulders like two youngsters in a friendly wrestling match. James issued instructions to the men at the canoes, then led Cortean into his quarters, where the two old cronies talked for hours. Ted wandered idly around outside, hoping for a chance to talk to or even just be near his new-found hero.

He wandered down to the river again to watch the men lay out the canoes, check each one carefully for needed repairs, and get them all ready for the trip on the morrow. Ted took one last look around him then. He looked at the deep dark woods, wondering when he would see them again, and the factory too.

What sort of country was he going to? Would he see the wonderful mountains? He wished they might start out for the west right then, so that they might reach the mountains all the sooner. He wandered into the fort again, still dreaming.

CHAPTER FIVE

YORK lay far behind them. In the days that followed their departure from the factory there was little time to think of anything except the daily labours. Although he was not expected to handle a paddle or carry the hundred-pound packs over portages, Ted had been given certain tasks to look after on the long journey. Each night, while the men hauled the canoes far up on the sand and built their low shelters, if such were needed, Ted spent his time helping the cooks prepare the main meal of the day. At each halt there was a mountain of wood to gather for each fire, and oceans of water to be hauled to fill the great copper kettles. Endless miles of errands between camps up and down the beach or sand spit where they had stopped for the night. Each canoe, with its own crew, had a separate camp with its own leader, so that in order to keep every part of his company in touch, MacDonnell sent his orders by runner from fire to fire. Ted, being free after his meal, served in this capacity.

Weeks of good living and exercise at the fort had filled the lad out now and hardened his muscles, so that he was a much different boy from when he first arrived. Being a normally healthy fellow, he had soon recovered his vitality; and the days spent in the woods and out in the sun had browned him almost like the Indian boys he played with. Now, after a fortnight on the "travail," the journey, he was gradually becoming used to steady labour. It wasn't as

though he worked all the time, though. His father spent a great deal of time teaching him. With the few books they had brought, and by scratchings on the sand, the elder MacDonnell tried to give his son at least a small amount of education.

But Ted's education was not all to do with book learning. His new friend, Corteau, took him in hand as well. Although Ted had never fired a gun, he often went with Corteau when the Canadian took time to hunt meat for their meals.

"Some day," sighed Ted on one occasion, "when I'm bigger, Father says I can learn to use a gun. I sure wish he'd let me start now."

"Have you nevair shoot de gon?" asked René, astonished.

"No. Father says I have to wait a few years yet. I keep asking him when, but he just says, 'one of these days.' Only the day never comes."

"Hah!" snorted Corteau. "I'm know dat man long time. He's planty good fellow. But I t'eenk he's leetle bit soft in de head. How he expec' hees boy to be beeg hunter eef he don' know for to shoot? By gar! We feex dat, you an' me. We don' tell nobody not'ceng. We shoot de gon in de woods an' you' papa, hees don' know not'ceng about eet, eh? W'at you say for dat?"

"Oh, René, you mean you'll teach me how to shoot? Can I really fire it?" The lad danced around the man, clapping his hands and laughing.

"Sure I'm mean dat. Here, over here ees de clearing. Now I'm show you t'ing or two. Yo' pay planty attention to w'at I tell yo', hey?"

"Oh yes, René. I'll listen and learn everything you tell me."

"Good!" Corteau rested the long gun against a tree and unslung the belt from across his shoulders. This he laid on the ground. They knelt close together as, with his knife, the Frenchman pointed out the various articles.

"Now dees powder horn, yn' know w'at he ees for?"

"Yes, I've seen father's at the fort. It's just like this one."

"Sure, jus' de same. I'm make heem from de same buffalo. Now, deea leetle bag, she's got de ball. I make de ball wit' dis leetle t'eeng, de bullet mould. Make de bullet from de lead bar at the fort, yo' know?"

"Yes, I watched the men load the canoe when we left. Those bars of lead are awfully heavy, aren't they? And I saw Father making some balls with one of those things too. He was going to sell his old rifle and the fellow wanted some balls to go with it." He picked up the tool, a pair of plier-like handles with two hemispheres on the ends, which when closed formed a large hollow knob. "There's a lot more work to making these bullets than loading a gun with the new kind," observed Ted. "I guess it takes a long time to make a lot of them."

"Aha!" exclaimed Corteau triumphantly, "but dat's de trouble. W'en yo' got no more bullet for new rifle, den yo' got to take all de empty case ap' mak' de new shell wit' dem. Got to fill dem wit' powder and put in de cap, and make de ball and put heem in, jus' like in de ol' muzzle-loader. Only t'ing better, dat's give yn' somet'eeng for to do in de winter time w'en de snow's too deep to hunt."

"Well, I think I know all about that part now. When are we going to shoot?"

"Boy, boy, you got to wait a leetle bit. Firs' we learn de

parts, den we learn how to use dem. Now de cap." A small cup-shaped piece of copper was taken from the little box. "We got to put wan cap on de nipple, here, like so, ever' time we shoot." He placed the cap on the small pipe that stuck out from the side of the barrel. Over this cap the hollow end of the heavy iron hammer would fall, striking hard enough to explode the chemical mixture it contained. From the nipple the fire would travel down the pipe and unto the main powder charge in the barrel, setting off the explosion that sent the bullet out with terrific force. All this Corteau explained carefully to the boy, showing him how to cock and uncock the huge hammer, and how to squeeze the trigger so as not to spoil his aim.

"An' make planty sure ever' time yo' shoot de gun, blow quick t'rough de barrel for to clean out de nipple. She's get plug up wit' burned powder an' yo' got to keep heem clean all de time, or de fire she don' catch de powder. Den yo' got to pull de charge an' load her again."

Ted caught his breath as Corteau, fully enjoying this game, handed the rifle to him. He took it, grasping it tightly in both hands as though he was afraid it might suddenly jump away. Trying to copy the woodsman's pose, he raised it slowly to his shoulder. As the barrel came up, René touched the hammer. "Yo' got to geeeve her full cock," he explained, stepping hastily out of the way.

On the far side of the little clearing, about thirty yards distant, stood the rotting skeleton of a tree. Ted took careful aim at the knot which showed black near the very centre of the stump. As he peered down the barrel he was amazed to see the tree, bushes, gun, and everything else whirling and bobbing as though they were alive. "Hol' her steady, boy," came the reassuring voice of the instructor. Grad-

ually, as he tightened his grip, the world stopped bouncing and the target showed clear and black against the white of the stump. The man beside him, the sky, earth, trees, everything was shut out except the mark on the tree as it showed through the eye of the sight. As he brought the bead of the front sight to bear on his mark, Ted closed his eyes, held his breath, and yanked on the trigger. Not a thing happened. A dry chuckle came again from the Frenchman "See, remember w'at I tell yo'? Yo' got to make her full cock. Pull dat hammer all de way back, like so, till she's makot de click."

With all his might Ted hooked a thumb over the hammer as he had seen Corteano do, and drew it far back. When he felt that he must let go, there came a loud, satisfying snap and the hammer stayed back.

Once again he lifted the rifle to his shoulder and lined up on the stump. This time there was no waving or shaking. He touched the trigger with a steady squeeze as Corteano had told him to, and almost before he knew it, the gun went off. Something hard and powerful caught at the boy's shoulder, throwing him backwards, sending the rifle flying upwards and out of his grasp. A hundred shots echoed from the trees around, as blue smoke drifted in a cloud across the clearing. Aching but unhurt the lad sat up, searching for the lost gun. A dull sense of amazement filled him, and a certain amount of relief in knowing that he had succeeded. Then a loud snort woke him to the fact that his friend sat, or rather lay, on the ground behind him, shaking with laughter. Tears of mirth streaked down his dusky cheeks.

Ted got slowly to his feet, feeling foolish and rubbing his

aching shoulder "What's so funny?" he asked, a little annoyed.

"Ho ho HO!" Corteau could hardly speak. "Firs' time I see de gun shoot bot' way at de same time!" he howled.

Ted brushed some of the dust and leaves from his jacket and walked across to the target. "Well," he called back, "I don't see as it makes much difference what happens to the hunter, as long as he hits what he's aiming at." He pointed to the neat black hole in the shattered knot. "By gar!" exclaimed Corteau, scrambling to his feet and running over to look, "by gar!"

If James MacDonnell ever guessed what was going on between his son and the old voyageur, he never let on. Day after day they made their way up the Nelson. And every day or so the two fast friends would disappear into the underbrush, leaving the rest to make camp. If any man wondered how an experienced bushman and hunter, a celebrated one-shot man, could use up so much powder and ball and return with so little game, he never mentioned it. So long as there was enough meat for the party, nothing would be said about the time spent in obtaining it.

Ted's thirteenth birthday found him treading up the road to Norway House. There was much here to remind him of York Factory, except the presence of ocean ships. Here, at the extreme northern end of huge Lake Winnipeg, this settlement seemed almost like home. This was the cross-roads of the north. Brigades coming in from the south, from the west, and from the north, meeting the brigades from the east, gathered in common friendship at the great depot.

Here the west-bound brigade stopped three days to take on fresh supplies of meat and pemmican. They also took

part in the noisiest celebration Ted had ever seen. These voyageurs were a carefree, happy lot, loving fun and music and dancing, and taking all they could before heading out to the wilderness. After three days of doing nothing, he was almost glad when they embarked once again. But this time they headed, not up a river, but straight out on to the lake. Here, were it not for the heavy loading of the canoes and the experience of the paddlers, they would soon have been upset in the rolling waves when the sweep of the wind caught them.

It was long after dark when the first canoe came in sight of the far shore. How the guides could tell where to head when no land could be seen, was a mystery to Ted, but they held a straight course for some invisible point across the water and somehow struck it just right. Resting on the shore for an hour, they made a quick meal of dried meat and tea, then pushed on into a stream that flowed into the lake. Ted was amazed when they came out on a wide river. This, his father told him, was the mighty Saskatchewan.

It had been a long day, and presently Ted fell asleep to the music of hissing water, lulled by the gentle rocking of the canoe and the steady dip and surge of the paddles. He was awakened by a hand on his shoulder, shaking him. "Ted, Ted, wake up, lad." It was his father. They had reached camp for the night. This was the post of Cedar Lake, where they were to stay for several days, resting and repacking.

From Cedar Lake they proceeded westward steadily, struggling up the Saskatchewan, passing post after post, some of them Company establishments, others erected by the old Northwest Company or the short-lived XY Company. Some of the forts were in good repair and bustling

with activity; some, very quiet, had long since been abandoned to the wilderness. The latter were falling into ruin and fast disappearing under the advance of undergrowth, for the forest eagerly takes back what it can. Ted thought of the men, forgotten now, who had struggled against nature and man to carve these posts out of the wilds, men who had fought and died in the service of the Company. Certainly, he thought, this was a strange land, and the Company ruled a vast empire.

Little can be said of the trip up the Saskatchewan. Mostly it was the same thing day after day, paddling and hauling and portaging by day, camping under the stars or quartering in some lonely outpost by night. As they ascended the river, it grew slightly narrower, and a little swifter, and there appeared more gravel bars and sand spits to impede their progress. Although most of the men had made this trip before, there could be no way of knowing what lay ahead, for the river flowed through shifting sands and gravel beds part of the way, and each year the floods brought down more, so that the river's course changed from time to time. Where there was a deep channel last fall, this year there might be an island. And some places where there had been a gentle current had now turned into raging torrents, forcing the men to drag their craft upstream by towing-line.

When one boat struck the clinging muck or rasped on gravel, it was the signal for everyone to jump out and pull it free. The canoe, nosing into a newly formed sandbar that lay hidden beneath a ripple, would shudder and slide to a halt, bobbing violently as the men leaped over the side. Standing along each side, they would grasp the canoe and heave mightily to try to force it ahead and into the deeper

water beyond the shoal! The men whose stations were at the front of the canoe usually found themselves in ankle-deep water, but the poor fellows who handled the rear half were often working in water up to their necks. This was mountain water, icy cold most of the time, and the rocky bottom was slick with a coating of greasy mud.

Corteau, who seemed to get this position every time, voiced the sentiments of the rest. "Sacre bleu!" he would gasp, and stagger as the craft shifted forward a few feet, throwing him flat in the water. "Nom de petit bleu cochon!" he would howl, coming up blowing like a whale. "Nom de nom, leesten at w'at I tell you. W'en we are get to Edmonton an' out on de prairie, den I be plenty happy, me Dere we got no water. Dere I be dry for so long I live, me I neva'n go on de water no more, not Corteau! Ever' time she's go on de mud! Ever' time she's stuck on de rock, Corteau he's almos' drown himself. We get to Edmonton, I'm quit de canoe for good, you leesten at me?"

And so it would go, forging slowly upstream against the current, hauling and poling over the shallows, wet to the skin most of the time and tired to death at night.

When they had cause to lay over for a day or two, what spare time Ted's chores allowed him was spent in learning the lore of the country. His marksmanship improved greatly under the strict teaching of Corteau, his reading and writing advanced steadily under the stern eyes of his father, and his love for the great outdoors grew with each new dawn.

Sixty-seven days after leaving York Factory, the West Brigade reached their destination, Fort Edmonton. It was the flag they first caught sight of, high on the bluffs above

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the river, as it fluttered proudly over the great walled fort. Rounding the bend, they beheld a sight none could ever forget. The massive log palisades and cannon towers, behind which were the crowded streets of the enclosed town, marked the greatest centre of trading and food supply in the Territories. This was Fort Edmonton in the year 1866.

CHAPTER SIX

BUMMING along on the hard wooden wagon seat, Ted found it very difficult to believe that in such a short time things could be so different. Ten days ago he had been gliding swiftly and smoothly along the river, sliding easily up to the banks of the Saskatchewan, at Fort Edmonton. Ten days later, here he was bouncing and swaying across a land where rivers and streams were hardly big enough to swim in. At least, so it seemed after living for two months on the huge Saskatchewan. But here, after two days of travel, they were out of sight of water most of the time, and when seen it was only in the form of tiny creeks and mudholes. The great forests through which they had come all the way from York had now dwindled to a few lonely stands of poplar or pine. Most of the country seemed covered with low bush.

The change from canoe to horse was even more startling. No more paddling or portaging, and no longer was there any need for one to leap from his seat to force the craft ahead by might and main. Now he could sit back and watch as their simple camps were made and broken, could watch as the grizzled teamsters created miracles from practically nothing. Here on the prairie they had little wood, little water, and only a handful of men, but their stops were short and pleasant, requiring little physical effort compared to camping with the brigade. Instead of needing wood and water for twenty camps, their little cooking fires,

built Indian style, took only a few branches of dried willow or pine, and they camped where the water was but a few feet away. Unlike those in the forest of the north, the nights here were quiet, unbroken by cries of animals. Even the wind was still.

For seven days they plodded steadily southward, sometimes stopping for a few hours to dicker with a camp of Indians who had pelts to sell. When there was only the monotonous prairie stretching around them, they varied their mode of travel by walking, hunting alongside as they moved. Often the drivers would trade places with one of the horsemen, just for the change, and as often as not it was Corteau who took the reins of the wagon in which Ted sat.

"By Saint Joe!" the old hunter started off on one such occasion, "w'at I tell you, Ted? Don' I say here on de prairie u de good dry lan'? No water here to boddle fellow Got no stunkin' canoe for push t'rough de mud; no holes for make de feller drown. I stay here in de dry, me. Never no more I'm get in de water. Nom de nom, I t'eenk even I don' take no more de bat'. No no, leetle fren', you never catch ol' René Corteau in de water no more, you bet. I stay up here on de top de wagon, like so, an' let de horse pull me t'rough de reever, like dia." They were crossing a small stream, and in the middle of it Corteau raised a great shout: "'Allo, you steenkin' reever! You see me, Corteau, up here?'" He raised a fist and shook it at the water. "You don' catch dia Frenchman walk in de water no more. No more he's gone push not'in' t'rough de mud—— Hey! W'at's dia?—— Hey, horse—don' stop here!—Horse! Get up an' pull, you lazy donkey, you! Sacré nom de cochon!—HORSE—PULL!" But all the pleading and names he called did not help the team. They were stuck

fast. Even the mightiest efforts of the animals were useless. The rear wheels, passing over mud softened by the other travellers, were slowly sinking lower and lower with each second. Clearly there was only one thing to do.

"Nom de cochon bleu!" bellowed Corteau, leaping to his waist in thick black goo. "How can it be?" He put his shoulder to the wheel. "Always Corteau ces en de water." But nevertheless he did his part, and as the others strained with him, the vehicle slowly was drawn out of the hole and up onto firm, dry land.

The mission they were to perform was actually two jobs : to rove this south country selecting likely sites for future posts for the Company, and to induce the Indians to trade with the Company rather than with unscrupulous traders from across the border. For this purpose they had brought the three wagons of trade goods from Edmonton, to offer as gifts of friendship and to trade for what pelts might be on hand at the time. As each wagon was loaded with furs, it would be sent back to the fort.

On the seventh day out of Edmonton they came to quite a large river, formed by two streams that joined at a ford. Here was undoubtedly the perfect spot for a post, and MacDonnell noted it in his journal. They crossed over and continued on along the trail.

Now here again the land changed. Coming out of the hilly bush country, they found themselves on the vast prairies. Ahead and to the east were only the rolling plains, covered with brownish grass, but turning to the west, they could not help staring in awe. There, only a few miles distant, rose the purple shadows of the mountains.

As the hills became lower and the land flattened, the mountains seemed closer, until the travellers were tempted

to halt for the day and ride over to them. When MacDonnell asked how far they were away, one of the teamsters turned to an Indian who was acting as guide. For a few moments they talked together in that strange language of half-song, half-grunt that the Assinibounies have. Then the interpreter gave Cortéau a wink.

"You know what he says?" Cortéau had been trying to follow the talk, but it was too much for him. "Well," the teamster went on, "he says they're about two days' march from here, them mountains."

"Two day!" exclaimed Cortéau.

"That would be about seventy miles, I reckon," figured MacDonnell.

"Two day!" Cortéau shook his head wonderingly. "By gar, dey look so close I'm t'eenk I walk to dem in wan hour." His eyes flew wide open as a sudden thought struck him. "Nom de nom! Eef dey are dat beeg w'en dey are seventy mile away, how beeg dey be w'en you are on dem?"

This idea so staggered him that he could think of nothing else to say. The rest of the party said nothing either, for the sight had taken their breath away, and indeed Ted could hardly keep from running towards the peaks. How grand, he thought, to be able to go there! Some day he might. Some day when he was big. Some day he would go to those mountains. It was a promise he made to himself.

When the mountains crept so close that they appeared to be just over the next ridge, the party turned due south, paralleling the ranges. Here they came to another valley, this time with only a small river at the bottom. The trail led down grassy banks to a stream that ran cold and clear through deep beds of gravel.

After an easy crossing of the wide but shallow stream,

the trail led slightly eastward before it turned again south and curved around a large hump of land which the Indians pointed to and called *Sitook Spagway*. They explained that it meant "middle heights," for it was really a long ridge running some distance to the south. Striking out across the plain, the party headed directly toward the Is-pit-see River. As they progressed, the land flattened even more, leading them through miles of bare prairie. Whitened bones of buffalo told of the passage of hunters many years before Ted, his eyes still on the mountains to the west, became puzzled over something he knew was missing. Something was strange out here on the flatlands and he could not think what it was. Then suddenly it struck him. Trees! For twenty miles and more they had not seen a single tree, save for the few poor willows along the creek called Okiotoka, which they had just crossed. As he looked around there was nothing to be seen on the plain but waist-high grass. Mile after mile they marched through it, threading between dry creek banks and dusty buffalo wallows.

Suddenly they came to a steep drop and below, right at the end of the trail, was the river. Out of nowhere, it seemed. First there had been only flat grasslands, then the ground had dropped out from under them without even a warning slope. The trail led directly into the river over the twelve-foot cutbank. Then to the right of the old trail they saw the new track where travellers had gone around this newly washed-out part of the trail. They passed on, marvelling that a river could cut its way through the earth like that without showing a sign of itself. The high water from spring floods had undermined and cut away part of the prairie. The new trail led a little westward, away from this sudden bend of the river, for here the banks prevented

any thought of crossing. This was the famous Is-pas-que-how, or Spitzee River, known far and wide for the fact that it could be crossed at only one point. This is where the trail led them.

Watching from his seat on the first wagon, Ted spied the difference far ahead. To the east and north lay prairies, to the west was the long spine of the Spagway, hiding the mountains; but ahead lay a long dark line, low on the horizon. As they drew closer the line broke up into separate clumps and stands of—trees. Here was where this crossing got its name, Spitzee—"The river with the high wooded banks." Rising like an oasis out of the bare brown grass, this little river cut through miles of the dry country, bringing green life as it flowed. From here to the mountains ran an unbroken chain of light forest. The dark green of the woods stood out against the hills, making it the best landmark on the prairie. When the trees were reached the land suddenly dipped into a wide valley, a prehistoric river-bed where the little river dashed and foamed close under one high, protective bank.

Here the valley was lush and green, and the woods thick with game. And here also the Indians camped, for from this point of shelter all parts of the surrounding plains could be reached quickly and easily when the buffalo were sighted. As the party forded the swift little stream and pulled up onto the grassy flats of the old river bottom, they looked out upon long, flat lowlands, dotted with small clumps of bushes. Two miles to the south rose the far bank of the old river, brown and rugged against the sky. And along the top of this bank, spaced side by side, stood Indian tepees. Not a single row, but three and four tents deep, stretching as far along the banks as the eye could follow,

around the bends and twists until trees in the valley hid them from sight. When Ted attempted to count them he got nearly to two hundred before he lost track.

This was the gathering-place of the tribes. Every traveller going through the country was forced to pass through this valley, for here was the only place on this river that remained fairly shallow all year long, where the banks sloped gently enough to allow horses to get down and up again. Here also the woods teemed with all kinds of life, which the Indians could live on while they rested and waited for the tremendous herds of buffalo to pass close enough for them to make a real hunt. At Spitzee the water was good. Firewood lay strewn all through the bushes and the slender saplings made fine tepee poles. Fish from the stream varied their diet, and they could meet old friends for a game of chance, or perhaps do a little trading. And here at Spitzee, James MacDonnell's heart parted from the Hudson's Bay Company. He looked at the land and he looked at the tepees of the Indians. He thrilled at what he saw there, and he decided his future.

"René!" he called, "Ted!"

"W'at yo' want, Jeem?" Corteau and Ted came to stand beside him.

"I've just had a great idea. How would you like to go into business for ourselves? Quit the Company for good."

"Jeem, Jeem! W'at yo' mean, go into business for ourself?"

"Just what I said. Look here, René, and you too, Ted. Right now all we're doing is working ourselves to death trying to make more money for the Company. I know they treat us right, but think of the chances there are here to make your fortune. Suppose we were selling all these furs

for our own profit! Man! Man! We'd make our fortunes in a couple of years. Why, no white man has ever tried trading out here. These Indians have never seen steel knives, most of them, or axes or kettles. They've got a few guns, to be sure, but look at the need for powder and lead. And the buffalo! When the buffalo run comes they'll be slaughtered by the thousands. Why do we have to be satisfied with the mouse's share when the lion's share is right here in front of us? With our own post right here in the centre of things we could have the pick of all the hides in the country. What do you say, René? Ted?"

"W'at I say? I t'eenk you planty crazee een de head, me. But Jeem, mebbe I'm be leetle bit crazee too. I'm like dat idea, I say you bet."

"Father"—now Ted found his voice—"you mean we can stay in this wonderful place and live by ourselves and have our own home just like Mother——" The words were out before he could stop them.

"Aye, lad!" said his father gently. "Just like your mother wanted us to. We'll trade with the Indians as long as trading is good, but some day soon I have an idea this country will have more than Indians and buffalo and grass. Settlers will come. And with them will come ploughs and cattle and farms. Some day this will be a great farming country, and right in the middle of it will be our farm. René"—James turned to his partner—"what say we make camp here for a day or two? Since we promised to do a job for the Company, we'd better keep our word. I'd like to look over this valley and maybe we can pick up a few pelts at the same time."

The guide, a silent brown native from this part of the country, led them down a gentle slope onto a half-hidden

trail in the short grass of the valley. The three Indians who had hired out to them were all Assiniboines, and were known locally as "Stonies." The Stonies knew this land as though it was their own back yard, for most of them had lived here all their lives. They knew the camping-places, too, and the guide led the way along the dim trail away from the river, away from the main encampment, and far off the beaten trail. The party moved slowly across the floor of the great river-bed, eastward between the high old banks until they were almost underneath the north bank. This was what their man had been heading for. Under the bank of the ancient river was a tiny stream, almost hidden in the long grass that bent over it. The source of the stream was a spring of icy, sweet water that bubbled and gurgled out of a deep bed of clean white sand. A few yards below it grew a clump of willow, providing enough fuel for a short camp.

This was a campground unknown to most travellers and used only by the few who stayed for a night and passed on their way, for there was no game close enough to feed even one family. Beside the spring they stopped and without hesitation threw themselves flat on the grassy bank to bury faces and heads in the ice-cold water. The clean white sand soon removed all traces of travel grime from them; and being fully refreshed, they set to work making their camp for the night.

With their chores finished and their stomachs full, the men, both Indian and white, lay or squatted around the fire and tried to carry on some kind of conversation by the light of the leaping flames, while James started to compose his letter of resignation from the Hudson's Bay Company. It was a harder thing to write than he had thought, so

MacDonnell put it away and joined the others. Ted sat in the firelight trying to pick out of the chatter the few words of Stony that he had learned along the way. The night was warm and he dozed where he sat.

Across the bottom-lands the night wind whispered and in the long grass little whirlpools sprang up, chasing each other back and forth across the rippling milks. The guttural voices of the Indians crackled with the fire, and the hoarse questions of the white men rasped out above all other sounds. In one of the long pauses that is a mark of respect for conversation among Indians, one of the guides turned his gaze upon the fascinated boy who squatted by the wagon.

"Suh-kah-nah-bi," he rumbled. "Pok-sah-poo, pok-sah-poo." At the same time he motioned with one hand for Ted to come to him.

"He wants you to go over there," explained one of the drivers. Ted rose hesitantly, looked at his father who nodded, then walked over to where the Indian sat. The native motioned for him to sit. No word broke the stillness for several minutes as three pairs of dark savage eyes looked at Ted from head to foot, and the boy felt little shivers skipping along his backbone. Then . . .

"Suh-kah-nah-bi oxie-na pi-gon." A chorus of grunts came from the other Indians as they nodded their vigorous agreement. "Oxie-na-pi-gon. Ah-ki-YIM! Ah-ki-YIM!"

"Say!" exclaimed Barkow, one of the teamsters, "them redskins have took quite a shine to you, young feller. They say you're okay. They say you're a good man, plenty good, an' that's something, comin' from a Injun." Ted beamed at this praise.

"What's that Suh-kah—whatchamacallit?" he asked.

"Wal now, I don't rightly know just how to say it in English. Seems to be some kind of nickname or something. Kind of a slang word for 'youngster'. Like our 'kid,' I reckon. Say boy! When Injuns get to callin' you pet names it means you strike 'em right, yes sir! You ain't ever goin' to have much trouble with 'em."

Ted could find nothing to say, but he looked the Indian straight in the eyes and what he saw there made him more sure than ever that he was going to like this country. Then his father called to him:

"Time to hit the hay, son. Got a hard day tomorrow, you know" Although he would have liked to stay up all night to hear the stories of these mighty hunters, his first duty was obedience to his parent and he sorrowfully went to his bedroll. While the men continued their talk for a while, Ted lay awake thinking of the new word. SUH-kah-nah-bi! That's what it sounded like. Sukanabi. It rolled from his tongue easily and he thrilled again to the sound of it. As he closed his eyes the wind dropped to a whisper and over the rumble of the men's voices around the fire he heard a long, low cry far away on the night air. Somewhere out on the plain the lone grey wolf worshipped the moon, and in a moment the cry was picked up by a dozen shrill voices as the coyotes heard it. The song was passed from hill to hill until the chorus drifted up and down the valley, filling the night with eerie sound. Ted fell asleep to the lullaby of the prairie wolves.

CHAPTER SEVEN

"RENÉ, Barlow says the best place to get supplies and trade goods is in Fort Benton, across the border." James stirred the hot ashes of their morning fire. "What say we head south and pick up a load?"

Corteau thought a moment before answering.

"W'at we do wit' de wagon an' men? An' de fur we got already? Dey belong to de Company, better we don't steal dem, eh?" He chewed a cud of tobacco as he went on, "I t'enk better we finish dis trip, mebbe make heem quick." MacDonnell pondered these words for a minute.

"Aye, that's true," he agreed. "The gear does belong to the Company and we hired out to do this job. But the Company owes us wages. We can take it out of the horses and furs. I don't think they have any kick on that. Maybe some of the Indians will stick with us for a ways, eh?"

"Ah, oui, my fren' Dese Injun stay wit' us so long we want dem, I t'enk. But Jeem, ol' René he's got de not'er idea. W'y I don't take some de fur an' de money an' ride fas' to dia Fort Benton? Den I buy plantry supply an' bring heem back wit' me an' meet you at de border. Mebbe I hire de wagon an' driver for carry heem dat far, hey?"

"René, that's it! We'll take our time going down there so as to give you enough time to get to Benton and back before we have to start back. We'll make a rendezvous somewhere on this side of the line and you can meet us there. I'll send a note back to the Company telling them

we'll finish this trip and take our pay out of the furs. They trust me enough. We'd better wake the boy now and get on with our peace-making. I guess the Stonies can understand our drivers well enough." He went to the wagon and roused Ted, then returned to the fire. "I know there aren't many pelts in the camps at this time of the year, but I understand there's going to be a big buffalo drive in a few weeks. I'd like to stay to watch, but the sooner we get going south the sooner we'll be able to set up shop here on our own."

Presently Ted came up, rubbing the sleep from his eyes. As he knelt by the spring to drink and wash, his father issued stern orders for the coming day. "Son, I want you to stay very close to us today. We'll be going through some of the camp and these Indians don't know us yet. There may be any number of tribes camped up there on the bench, but we'll talk only with the head men. We're trying to make friends with them, you understand, and even if they are a bit hostile to whites now, we'll try to win them over to us. Do you hear, lad?"

"Aye, Father. But can't I explore the camp? Our Indians will look after me."

"I think not, son. They'll be very busy, now that Corteau is heading south —" Ted broke in quickly: "René heading south?" He looked anxiously at his friend. "Where are you going, René? Are you leaving us?"

"Non, non, leetle sparrow. Ol' Corteau he's jus' gone to de Fort Benton for to buy trade supplies for you' papa an' me w'en we build our own post here. I be back een five, seeex day. Don' you worry, I come back."

Ted heaved a big sigh of relief, then at his father's bidding he fell to eating his breakfast. The teamsters were even then hitching up one of the wagons, and within half

an hour the party was rolling back toward the crossing, leaving two drivers behind to guard their other wagons and supplies.

When they struck the main trail, Corteau turned his pony southward and with a wave of his hand disappeared over the high bank, followed by two of the friendly Stonies. Earlier in the day messengers had been sent around to the various camps to summon the chiefs to a parley on the shore by the crossing, and here the traders halted, confronted by perhaps fifty brightly clad natives. With experience gained through his three years of dealing with Indians, MacDonnell soon had the whole assembly on good terms, presenting each one with a peace offering of tobacco. With much ceremony and with the help of the remaining Stonies of their party he explained to the gathered chieftains his purpose in coming to them, promising that he would return in a few weeks with goods to trade for their buffalo robes. This was the speech he had given so often in the past months and as he spoke he suddenly remembered that he would soon no longer be speaking for the Hudson's Bay Company. Well, time enough for that when Corteau met them with their trade goods.

Ted, as he had promised his father, stayed close during the day, and when he headed back to camp that afternoon he felt that his whole day had been wasted. For another night they sat in camp while their Indian guides unfolded the wonders of native life. Ted could not follow the swift conversation, but the teamster, Barlow, took time to translate for him each story. These Indians were of the Assiniboin nation and Ted could not understand why they were called "Stonies." Barlow asked the Indians, who explained it thoroughly to him.

"These Assiniboines," drawled Barkow, "they really belong to the Sioux nation. Used to live 'way out in the middle of the prairies, but last few years they've moved over to the mountains where there's more game. Well, these Injuns, like I say, are cousins of the Sioux, an' the name for all Sioux is 'po-en' or 'po-el.' That means just plain 'enemy' in Cree, but they couldn't tell which enemy they was talkin' about. Now these Injuna here they got a funny way o' cookin' their food. Don't roast it or fry it like most, but they boil it. Ain't got no pots or nothin', so they digs a hole in the ground and lines it with a piece of skin. Then they makes a fire close by and heats up some rocks. They puts their meat in the hole and fills the hole with water, and when the rocks get hot, they take a couple sticks and lifts the rocks and puts 'em in the water with the food. Tame there's two-three hot rocks been dropped in, that water's gettin' pretty hot so they just keeps puttin' in hot rocks till she's cooked good. After they's kept that up for a while, dropping hot rocks in that there pot, that water would be boilin' hot. The Greeks knew this, so they called 'em after it, 'Assinnee,' or 'the people who cook with stones.' Put 'em together an' you get 'the enemy that cook with stones' or in Injun, Assinnee-po-en. But then the whites come along an' couldn't say it right, so they made it sound as close as they could, which was Assiniboine. An' that's what it is now. See?" After this explanation Ted felt that the day had been saved, for a number of questions had been answered in the story.

The next day, when they again set out on the south trail following in the tracks of Cortear, and his Indians, they rolled along uneventfully across the dry prairies, passing

many small creeks and deep coulees, steadily moving toward their turning-point. For three days more they plodded on. The weather was dry and hot hotter than Ted had ever known it could be, for the sun burned down mercilessly upon the grasslands, making hills and valleys shimmer and ripple as he looked at them. And far out on the prairie, where there was nothing but grass, sometimes rose up great purple hills covered with trees, or shining rivers and lakes would appear in the sky, so real that the white men could hardly believe their eyes. James realized that they were looking at mirages, where whole sections of the country just over the horizon were reflected in the sky. Reflected so realistically that men have been known to march for hours straight at them, only to see them disappear.

At the end of three days' travel they camped on a point of land at the junction of two large rivers, the rendezvous agreed upon by James and René. This part of the country was somewhat greener than the Is-pit-see Anota, or Spitzee Country, which they had chosen for their base of operations. Here in the south they were a little closer to the hills, and there were more trees.

Five days later Corteau arrived at the meeting-place. Besides himself and his two Indian guides he brought another white man, driving a heavy wagon loaded with their purchases. Enough, Corteau claimed gleefully, to last them a year. As soon as the goods were transferred to their own wagons, the Canadian party headed north again, and their American friend turned to make his way alone to Fort Benton.

The trail became familiar now, and certain landmarks stood out plainly. Ted tried to memorize them, having

nothing more interesting to do. Long since he had tired of the sport of pitching pebbles at the fat brown gophers that scurried out of their way through the dust of the trail. He had been greatly amused by the antics of these large rodents when he first saw them on the trip down, but now they ran all about without raising his interest. The ground along the trail was pumpled with their earth hills, and even the horses refused to shy any more when one skittered along in front.

Back over the rolling grass they travelled, and in three days were again entering the broad valley at Spitzee. This time they saw it first from the brow of the south bank, and from here it appeared entirely foreign. Below them waved a shifting floor of brown grass, "belly-lugh on a tall horse" as Barlow put it. Far across the valley was the dark line of trees where the river muttered and flashed. When the wind died to a whisper between gusts, they could hear the low roar of the water as it charged between its rocky banks. Over to their right and across the flats, under the far bank, they could just make out the tiny clump of willows that marked their camping-place at the spring. To their left, southwest along the curving benchland, stood the long lines of tepees, and straight west, framed between the high walls of the valley, rose the blue-and-white bulk of mountains. In the late morning sunlight they sparkled and shone like cut glass, and once again Ted experienced that queer longing to go to them.

Silently the traders moved down into the valley and followed the trail across the bottom-lands to the crossing. To their eyes it seemed that the valley and the hill could hold no more camps, yet lines of riders were even then moving in from several directions. The whites kept out of the trail

proper, for when an Indian band is moving it sets its own pace and he who would pass on the trail is forced to seek another road.

Ted watched these Indians with great interest as they rode slowly past. The proud bucks and older men sat their ponies as though they were grown to them. No saddles or bridles here. A piece of dirty blanket to sit on, a short length of rope or rawhide tied in a crude hackamore—that was all. Perhaps Ted had expected too much, but he was very much disappointed to see that all the natives were dressed much alike. Not in gay buckskins and flashing beadwork, or in waving war bonnets or bright blankets. True, some had blankets, but they were neither bright nor colourful. Ted did not think of the hot sun above them, Indians were Indians, and should be wearing full dress and blankets as they were supposed to. Instead, these people wore, for the most part, ragged buckskin leggings, shapeless hats, and even some remnants of coats or shirts, undoubtedly white men's clothing. When Ted mentioned this to Corteau, the Frenchman laughed. "Injuns jus' like you w'en he travel," he chortled, "be wear ol' clothes. Save de good clothes for party or ceremony. Besides dat, she's too hot, de day, for wear much clothes, I'm t'eenk." He nodded toward several younger men who rode in nothing but breechclouts tied around their slim brown waists.

"But aren't they all supposed to wear blankets and feathers, at least?"

"Ho, leetle fren'. How you like to wear blanket today? She's pretty hot, I'm tell you."

Ted felt sadly let down; but when the women went past his attention was distracted from his disappointment. They rode horses, like their men, but each horse was hitched to a

kind of yoke, or cross, of long poles. The poles were crossed in front of the rider and lashed together there. At the back they dragged along the ground, and between the wide-spread bums was hung a sort of platform of skins on which were lashed the family possessions, tent covers, food, clothes, and other items. Some of them, Ted was told, were their "medicine bundles", and this mystery he resolved to look into at his first opportunity.

The long line of horses plodded past, to the accompaniment of a curious sort of song or chant that the women seemed almost to breathe as they rode. As each horse bounced along, with every step the squaw on its back would give a low sound, like a grunt sometimes, or often a kind of burring noise, and every once in a while would come a high-pitched little shriek. Rising from dozens of female throats at once, this chorus seemed most unmusical; yet there was a strange sort of pleasing rhythm to it.

They waited until the line of Indians had passed and then continued to the crossing. Now came the problem as to the best place to build their little post. They made a small fire and boiled water for tea, discussing the subject with the Stony guides. As they squatted around the kettle, under the shade of tall poplars, the oldest of the Indians told them a story of this country of Is-pit-zee, a tale that had great bearing on sacred grounds of the Indians that must not be trespassed on. Ted listened to the translation with deep interest and the story stayed in his mind all his life.

Many years ago, [said the Stony] the whole earth was covered deep with a great flood. The rains fell for many days and when they stopped there was nothing to be seen

in all the world save water. But it happened that one person, a man called Napeo, was left in the world. Napeo swam on the water for many days searching for some sign of life or land, but there was none. Then one day he saw another creature swimming toward him. It was a muskrat, and the two were the only living things on the earth. They spoke together, wondering what to do, until Napeo said to the animal "Dive down to the bottom of this water, O little musquash, and bring me up some earth that I may make it dry to live on."

So the little muskrat dived down. In an hour he was back again, but he had not been able to reach the bottom. He tried again, and a day later he came up again, exhausted, but still he had not been able to reach the bottom. Once more he dived, but Napeo swam alone for a week, thinking that the trip was again unsuccessful. Then the muskrat floated to the surface. He was dead. But from under one little claw Napeo took a tiny bit of earth. The muskrat had managed to get to the bottom before he died.

Taking the speck of earth in his hand, Napeo began to roll it between his palms, and as he rolled, the earth grew larger and larger, and soon it was as big as it is now. Then Napeo made himself small and went about the earth making trees and grass and rivers and animals.

For many moons Napeo lived happily on the earth, but then he began to feel strange. He felt that there was something missing from his world. And with this thought he became very lonely, so he created another being, this time a woman. But after a while the woman became lonely for others of her kind, so Napeo created more. Now in order to look after his earth, Napeo found that he needed help, so he made a number of men, like himself. The people then

were divided into two camps, the men lived on the banks of a small river, and the women lived across the river on the other bank, and this river was called the Is-pas-qu-how, or Spitzee River.

After the world was in order and everything was going well, the woman whom Napeo had created first approached him, saying that her women were restless, and that they would like to choose mates from among the men. Napeo agreed, and it was decided that at a given time on the next day the women would line up along their side of the water, and the men would line up along the other. And so they did, but unknown to Napeo, the First Woman was a medicine woman, or witch. She had already arranged with her women that Napeo was not to be chosen by any of them, that he belonged to her. Thereupon she retired to her tepee and changed herself into an ugly old crone. She then took her place in the line. At the given moment the women went across the water into the camp of the men, and each woman chose herself a mate. Napeo waited anxiously for sight of the First Woman, for he felt sure she would choose him. But much to his disgust the only woman who came near him was a withered old hag. When she claimed right to him, he protested, and refused to go with her. Whereupon she changed herself immediately back to her original form.

"So!" she cried. "You would not keep your bargain. Very well, then, if you will not take the mate who chose you, you shall live alone for ever." So saying she cast a spell over Napeo and transformed him into a great tree. Then, being the only lone human in the world, she began to feel sorry for her folly and went to the tree that was Napeo. She put her arms around the rough trunk and be-

gan to weep bitter tears of sorrow, and when the tears fell to the ground they caused her feet to grow downwards. As the drops fell, a covering of rough brown bark began to form on the woman, and within a little while she had turned into a tree, side by side with her mate. And even now, on the banks of this very river, the two lovers may be seen, two huge old cottonwoods growing not three feet apart, with their branches grown together in their last embrace.

The story sounded like a fairytale to Ted, but the Indians swore that the trees still lived and that they were worshipped by all the passing tribes. The place, they said, was just a few miles up the river from the crossing. Of course, as it was a sacred place, white men would not be allowed to settle there; but a post close by on one of the many broad trails would surely draw much trade.

There followed a number of questions by Corteau and MacDonnell, and it was decided that the post should be built as close to the magic trees as the natives would allow. So they crossed the river again, heading upstream along the south side where the banks were far to their left and the shores of the river were level and thickly wooded. That night they pitched camp about two miles from the crossing. They found a small clearing in the underbrush, away from the river and from the main encampment of the Indians.

The woods all around were full of wildlife at this time of the year. Some of the trees were very large and very old, an occasional trunk measuring nearly three feet across at the base. They were not the best trees for cabin building because cottonwoods are heavy and crooked, but they thought that perhaps there might be enough straight trunks

in the surrounding area for their purpose. At any rate they would take the next day to look around for a suitable building site and also to have a look at the fabled Medicine Trees of the story.

Next day they left the wagons and gear in camp under the guard of the three drivers and rode through the trees along the banks upstream. Ted, having no horse of his own, was mounted behind Cortean on the woodsman's wiry little piebald. They had camped about a mile from the river the night before, and the dense bush allowed them only a glimpse or a slight sound of it as they rode westward. In places the undergrowth was so thick they were forced to skirt large areas, but in a short while they came out onto the green banks of the Spitzee River.

A hundred yards upstream an island broke the smooth flow of the river, and from this island a long file of horsemen wove up and over the north bank.

"Injun go home from church!" commented Cortean, and there across the narrow fork of the river, across the bare tip of the island and to one side of a small clearing, they saw the Trees. From their position on the bank, since their guides would take them no farther, the white men could see the two great trees, but only by moving farther over could they see the huge branch, as thick as a man, that joined the two, jutting from one tree and growing cleanly and solidly into the other. Little wonder that the natives regarded them as supernatural.

The ground around the Trees was bare of undergrowth and grass, trampled hard under the pressure of many moccasins. The smaller trees around had been bent and broken and uprooted, stripped of foliage by the passage of man and beast, so that the sacred trees stood alone in the centre

of a man-made circle. Piled between the trunks was a heap of offerings, food and tobacco and other prized possessions, left by the worshippers. If the Indians ever wondered how the gods enjoyed the food, they could have asked the gophers and birds that flocked to the feast as soon as the natives had disappeared.

They watched quietly as their own Indian guides crossed the stream and laid twists of tobacco on the pile. Then the party turned again to the woods, searching for some level, protected place where a cabin could be built. No attempt could be made to erect a post anywhere within a thousand yards of the river, for here in the flatlands they might be flooded out. The only level place in this vicinity was the top of the high banks, but here there was no shelter from the bitter north winds that swept down mercilessly in the winter time. Clearly, the only thing to do was set up a temporary camp right back where they had left the wagons. From there a suitable place could be located. They retraced their tracks until they came out into the clearing where their supplies were, and here the camp was pitched for the night. Ted had some trouble falling asleep that night. An unfamiliar sound kept him awake. Strange how one could forget the song of the night wind in the trees.

CHAPTER EIGHT

The spot they chose to build their post was close to where they had camped. In a clearing near the south bank they came upon a small creek angling west to join the Spitzen. Along the edge of this stream grew willow and other small bushes, but from there to the high banks was only grass. On the north side of the creek the woods began and from a few scattered cottonwoods spread out into the dense woodlands along the river. Just at the edge of the trees they cleared the site, and with the aid of the teamsters and their horses managed to pull as many straight logs to their work as were needed. Then, with the heavy work mostly done, they bade farewell to the two drivers, who headed back to Fort Edmonton with the Company's supplies and gear. The Stoney went with them.

Now MacDonnell, Ted, and Cortezo were alone. Log by log the little cabin went up, slowly and steadily. The heavy poplar logs, with bark on to keep them from splitting, were rolled into place on slender poles. The notches, not so cleverly cut as those at the Bay, were done on the ground in most cases, and the logs then rolled into position, where they dropped into place with little or no trussing. Twelve logs made up the front, while the back, which faced north, was ten logs high. This latter would be the blank wall, where no windows or openings were to be cut, only the massive stone chimney breaking the plain log wall; for from this direction would come the storms. The roof,

sloped towards the north, was started with long, thin poles, which in turn were covered with dried grass and slabs of bark. From the ground to one side and at the front they cut squares of heavy sod, which were laid like shingles, overlapping so that the rain would run off to the back. This was not only the easiest method but also the approved precaution on the frontier, for flaming arrows that might fall on the roof would do no damage to the sod.

As the labour grew harder with the raising of the few last logs, it became too heavy for the youngster; so instead of Corneau going after meat, Ted was sent. Having been assured by the old Frenchman that the boy could handle a rifle, James had no alternative but to let him go, for Corneau was needed more at the building. And so Ted found himself wandering among the trees of Spitzee. When a rabbit, brown and fat, leaped out of a thicket and bounded past, he almost automatically fired. The rabbit bounded high in the air and dropped dead. And another bunny met the same fate. A sleepy grouse did not rate a bullet, Ted merely knocked him off the limb with a stick. With the two rabbits and the bird in his belt he slipped silently and warily through the bushes. Not a sound except the breeze was to be heard in the forest.

Ted blinked in the dappled sunlight. The ever-changing pattern of shadow caused by leaves moving in the wind made sight a little uncertain. A flash of white caught his eye and he paused in mid-stride, as René had taught him. Animals, while unable to distinguish definite objects, can see movement far away. By standing absolutely still the hunter can often fool his prey into betraying itself. As he stood unknowing he began to bring the rifle up. So slowly that a watcher could not see it move, the long gun rose.

At the same time his head and shoulders swung ever so steadily and slowly toward the object. When the target is moving one can snap a shot quickly, but when the target is sitting and watching for danger, one must also be still.

The boy hardly breathed as he turned and brought the rifle up. He waited expectantly for the white shape to flash away, but it remained unmoving in the grass at the base of the tree. The game was too far away to be clearly identified, but the only animal that might be white was the rabbit, for summer was nearing an end and this was no doubt an early change. Then, too, some rabbits stay partly white all summer.

As the gun levelled at his shoulder he drew his bead, stopped breathing, and fired. As the echo of his shot bounced around the woods, his eyes stayed upon the target. It did not move, although his keen eyes could see the black spot where his bullet had struck it. Reloading quickly, he held his rifle ready as he advanced with great caution.

Each step nearer made him frown more and more in puzzlement. The target he had just shot was certainly not a rabbit. And it was certainly not an animal of any kind. Upon reaching it he carefully pushed aside the long grass that partly hid it, and a shiver ran through him as he recognized it. A human skull!

From its bed at the roots of the tree it grinned up at him, its blank eye sockets staring, and just above them the round black hole showed where his ball had crashed through. Near by in the grass he saw the ends of other bones, the rest of the skeleton. He stared fascinated for a moment, then walked away quickly. A few yards off he stopped and turned to look again at the tree where the skull lay. Then he noticed the tree itself. In the branches, some ten feet

above the ground, was a kind of platform, broken and smashed now by wind and age, but clearly built by human hands. Wondering, Ted made his way back to the clearing.

While the boy had been gone, MacDonnell and Corteanu had made good progress on the cabin, and now, as Ted came in sight of it, he was delighted to see that the building was almost finished except for the door and windows.

"Won't be long now," boasted James as the boy came up to them. "We'll be finished tomorrow for sure, and then we'll spend the rest of the time getting in our meat for the winter. Got a lot of work to do yet before we're ready to start business." Ted handed the rabbits and fowl to Corteanu, who took them off to the creek to skin and prepare for the pot.

"Father," said Ted as the elder MacDonnell seated himself on a log and lit his pipe, "I found a skull in the woods today. It was under a tree, and I thought it was a rabbit. I shot it. Do you think someone was murdered there?"

James puffed for a moment, then: "Oh, I doubt it, lad. Why don't you ask René about it?" And when the Frenchman came back from his chore they told him of the skull. René put the parts of the game into their big kettle which hung always over the fire, wiped his hands on his pants, and sat down beside his partner.

"A skull, eh? By gar, dat's a pretty bad ting for leetle boy to find. Out in de beeg wood, eh? W'ere you find heem?" Ted told him. "Aha. An' de tree, w'at you see on de tree, eh?" Ted told him about the platform. "Dere she een! Dat's Indian burial tree. Dese Indian here, dey don't dig hole in groun' w'en man die. Dey tak' him an' put heem in tree on de pole, lak' dat you see, an' pretty soon come de magpie and de crow an' eat hum, and de win' she blow hard

and knock heem down, an' de rain she make heem wet an' he ees rot de wood, and den de Injun heem fall on de groun'. Noen de norn, I see plenty skull here." He waved his arm in the direction of the deeper part of the bush near the river "Over dere, de groun' she's cover wit' bone. An' skull too. I bet some beeg fight be dere. Or mebbe de pox, lik' we see up nort' wan time."

He shook his head wisely, and then it was time for supper. That night they slept inside the cabin, proud of their work, knowing it was a solid shelter, knowing it would last them through the winter without trouble.

When the door and windows had been fitted, there remained nothing further to do to the cabin except build the rough furniture, however, this job could wait until freeze-up, when the trading business would fall off and there would be more time for such things. At present the biggest need was meat for the winter.

With this aim in mind the three whites began a concentrated hunt, bringing in as much game as they could shoot, snare, or otherwise kill. After several days the pile of meat was hardly enough to feed them until fall, let alone all winter, and the area was almost bare of game. The Indians on the banks above them took most of it, even though they were fast moving out onto the plains for the yearly hunt. According to word from passing natives, large herds of buffalo had been sighted a day's march to the east, and the hunters were moving after them. This was what the traders had come for, the time when buffalo by the hundred would be slaughtered, and the robes could be bought for little or nothing from the hunters. Now was the time to set up their trade counter and spread the word.

The door of the cabin had been made in two parts, each

half swinging independently of the other, so that the bottom half could be tightly barred while the top formed a sort of wicket through which the trading could be conducted. Bales and boxes of the trade goods were opened and spread out inside for the Indians to look at. The first robes came within a day or two, dry and hard, smelling of hair and blood, but scraped clean. As the first Indians spread the word, more and more hides were piled in the hut, and the knives, kettles, looking-glasses, and other demanded items moved in a steady stream through the open half of the door.

All through the transactions there was an air of good will hovering above the scene, for the fair dealing and quality of goods became known far out on the plains. Soon the Indians were lined up back to the far side of the clearing, waiting their turns to sell the fine buffalo robes they had risked their lives for. One robe might bring as much as a shining new copper kettle, or as little as a single steel skinning knife. As the weeks passed, Ted found himself busier than he could ever remember. Since the men were kept busy with the trading, all camp work fell to the boy. Now he had to fetch water and wood, do what hunting was required, and cook all meals for them. They woke at sunrise to find the savages already waiting with their great piles of hides, and the line did not thin until dark. Gradually the cabin became filled with the products of the trade, mostly buffalo hides, but with a few beaver and wolf skins mixed in.

And then the trade goods ran out. James MacDonnell watched his supplies dwindle at an alarming rate, and the day the shelves showed bare, he made the announcement to the still-coming Indians. Wails and growls of disappoint-

ment filled the air, and only by promising to return with more goods the next season was the post yard cleared.

Since their store of trade goods was depleted, there was clearly no sense in staying on for the winter, so the three went into conference as to the best way to haul their robes out.

"Since we're Canadians, and loyal to the Crown, seems like we ought to take our pelts to the Company," observed MacDonnell.

"*Mais oui, mon ami, dat ees so. But weel de Comp'ny geeve de good price lik' dat Fort Benton?*" inquired Corneau.

"Oh, I think Edmonton will see us get a square deal. Beside, we have to hole up somewhere for the winter. Suppose we stay at the fort there until spring. Then we can pick up a wagon somewhere and take a run down to Benton for our supplies. They don't care much what we do with our furs so long as they get our money."

"So we go to dat Edmonton. But w'at we do for wagon? How we are take dese pile of pelt out? Dat ees wan good question, eh?"

"Yes," agreed MacDonnell. "That's a big problem, René, but I remember something I saw in Edmonton on our way through. Do you think we could build one of those big carts they had there? The ones they call the Red River cart?"

"By gar, I t'eenk you got de idea! Wan dose cart like w'at is make from de stick, wit' no nail, only wood, and de tire make out of shaganappi? By gar, I don' see why not." And they put their heads together to figure out their new problem while Ted, much bored by it all, fingered the heavy pelts and tried to count how many might be in the

pile. Before he had got even half way through the pile, his father and Corteau called him and they went outside to begin construction of the cart.

Ted remembered the great high-wheeled carts, drawn by plodding oxen, that carried much of the bulky freight at Edmonton. The men felled saplings of the right size and soon had a rough framework laid out, ready for assembling. By drilling holes and cutting wooden pins, the lack of iron nails was overcome, while iron bands for the wheels were replaced by long thick strips of "shaganappi," green hide stretched tightly around the wheel and tied, then allowed to dry. The rawhide, on drying, would shrink and harden, drawing all the pieces together as tightly as though bolted. Even the axles were lined with thin raw leather, greased well with fat, bound in place with strips of hide and pegged securely with wood pins. The cart was made with double tongue, however, so that one horse might pull at a time, allowing the rider to walk by its side or ride the load, while the other rider spurred ahead on the other horse to clear the trail of obstacles or find a better way around.

The days had become cold and dry before they were ready to leave. The cabin, as was the way on the frontier, was left unlocked so that wandering travellers in need of shelter might find comfort in it. And with many last looks at their post, the three white men left the Spitzee country, headed north once again into the bushlands, north to Fort Edmonton, to friends, security for the winter, and the news they longed for of the outside world.

As they drew over the last bank, Round-leg, one of the lower chiefs with whom they had become acquainted, waited for them. In his hand he held a sheathed knife, encased in buckskin so wonderfully beaded that Ted's eyes

SUKANABI

popped from his head when it was handed to him. There followed more words in Indian, out of which Ted picked his new name, Sôkanabi, and several other things that he knew meant that the Indians would want their return the next spring, and promised many more fine hides if the white men would bring them guns and powder with which to shoot the buffalo. James MacDonnell, fully aware of the importance of this occasion, solemnly promised that they would return with the requested guns, grateful for this show of friendship displayed by the Indians.

The trio rode away with hearts high in the hope they felt for their trading venture; and as Ted fingered the lovely beadwork of his knife case and ran a thumb lightly across the keen edge, the squeaking of the cart wheels made up the tune of a little song that ran through his mind: Sukanabi . . Sukanabi . . Sukanabi . .

CHAPTER NINE

THE air, the grass, the whole world in fact, seemed hushed. Not a sound was to be heard upon the prairie. Not much could be heard anyway, above the moaning and creaking of the wagon wheels, but even when they stopped there was no sound. Where last fall, not eight months ago, Indian tents had lined the banks of the Spitzee, now there was nothing save the scattered bare poles of the lodges and countless tepee rings to mark where the hosts had camped. MacDonnell's party halted for a few minutes on the brink of the crossing before they attempted to buck the ice-filled current. The valley on this early April day seemed drab and colourless compared to their last sight of it. Poplars and willows stood naked along the shores, and even through the thickest part of the woods they could see the far-off peaks of the mountains. Ted was a little disappointed, but he remembered that it was not yet spring, not time for the leaves or green grass.

As they headed across the river he thought back to their just-completed trip from Edmonton. Instead of the seven or eight days it had taken last year, this journey, with loaded wagon, had taken just exactly three weeks. Three weeks of slogging through the softening ground, breaking through rotten ice on the streams, hauling and man-handling their loads every foot of the way. Poor Cortéau! He was even more disgusted than ever. But they had made it! If they had waited for break-up or until the land had

dried out, then the rivers would have been swollen too high for crossing, and the season nearly passed. As it was, here they were back at the Spitzee before the Indians had arrived. Relieved that the hard trip was over, they halted on the south bank for a rest before going upstream to their little post. Could they have lived there all winter? Ted found himself wondering this as they sat by the river. What if they had not gone back to Fort Edmonton—would they have been alive now? The boy could not help believing that they would have been. The Indians could survive, why not they? These thoughts were in his mind as they mounted and continued their way up the river. Ted rode his own horse now, a gentle little piebald. All the Indian ponies seemed to be pintos, shaggy and small and tough. He had made fast friends with his mount during the last few weeks. Although not the rider some of the Indian boys were, Ted could nevertheless stay on. But what a difference this was to a canoe!

It took them only an hour to travel from the crossing to their cabin. As they entered the clearing they could see it standing out dark and crude against the trees around. The sod roof was intact, as were the walls, but the lower half of the door sagged open. This was not strange, though. The code of the west held that one's door should be always unlocked to welcome the traveller. Someone who had taken shelter there had not shut it tightly enough, and the rough north winds had entered. Inside, all was in good order, even to the stack of firewood, newly cut by some recent occupant. A few dried leaves showed the entry of wind and weather, but otherwise the hut was ready to live in. They unloaded immediately, tethering their horses to near-by trees. Trade goods were unloaded, two wagons full of them,

and stacked on the shelves inside. The wagons were overturned behind the post, so that skulking night visitors could not make off with them without awaking the owners. There were five horses this time, allowing four horses to draw the wagons, and one for riding by whoever was hunting that day. The first job, clearly, was to build a corral for the stock.

The days that followed their arrival were crowded with new activities, yet they took much time for relaxation, too. Their trading started almost immediately, a few Indians following the wagon tracks to the cabin bringing the winter's catch of wolf pelts and buffalo hides. This year they determined to build a storage shack on one end of the cabin, however, there was too much to do to bother with that as yet. Only a few Indians found their way to the post this early, so that their days, for the most part, were filled with improving the yard around and digging a shallow well close to the cabin.

And so the first few weeks passed as the land gradually dried, ice on the river broke and melted, snowbanks turned grey and disappeared. Then with a rush spring was upon them. They took a short holiday, long enough to ride the mile or so upstream to have another look at the Medicine Trees while no one was around to see. Crossing the shallowest part of the stream, they climbed up the bank onto the island. There they were, alone and silent, rising tall and strong like the hundreds of others close by, except for the one difference of being joined together. About six or eight feet from the ground a great branch of one tree angled slightly upward until it entered the trunk of the other only a few inches away. The two had grown together so smoothly that there was no disfiguration or marring of

either trunk or bough. Ted shivered a little as he thought of the legend, and it ran through his head all the way back to the post.

Corteau paused at the edge of the clearing as they approached it that afternoon. The others came up silently as he pointed, without a word, to the distant river bank half a mile to the south. There was a sharp break in the smooth hill. A tepee! And as they rode farther, more tents came into view. The Indians were gathering again. All thoughts of the Medicine Trees left Ted's mind then. There were only about four tents so far, but more would follow soon, when the buffalo began to turn and head back north for the summer. Then the traders would be busy from morning until night as the pelts flowed in. But better than that, to Ted's way of thinking, it should be easy to make friends and be allowed to explore the camp.

No Indians came to trade while they waited the rest of that day, but perhaps the next day would see the start of the season. But next day was the same as before. Even though there were Indians camped on the ridge, none came to visit the post. Ted, quite disappointed at this, took his pony and rode out through the woods to the Spitzee. The valley was beginning to turn green now, and trees everywhere showed tinges of life. He walked the horse to the river edge but the water was too muddy to drink. He turned and rode up through the woods between the river and the post, heading toward the island and the Trees.

On the bank, deep in the brush, he halted to watch a small party of Indians place offerings at the base of the Trees. Quietly he dismounted, tied his pony to a willow, and walked along the bank to a point just out of sight of the ceremony. Here he sank to a squat on his heels, staring

across the rushing water. Then very quietly he crossed the shallow stream and hid on the outside of the clearing. For ten minutes he stayed motionless as he had learned to do back at York Factory. He watched the Indians as they advanced upon the Trees fearfully, placed their gifts very reverently between the trunks, and hastily backed away.

When the last of the worshippers had mounted and ridden away up the far bank, Ted got slowly to his feet, eased the ache out of his knees and started back toward his pony. He was just in time to see it quietly walking away led behind another shaggy native horse. Sitting low along the neck of the animal was an Indian. As Ted stared after them, they disappeared into the brush on the other side of the river, heading deep into the woods.

CHAPTER TEN

TED had only a boy's treble voice, but at the sight of his pony being stolen, he let out what might be called a roar of anger. He splashed across the river, scrambled up the bank and ran to where the horses had entered the brush. Frantically he dashed into the brush and trees, trying to get a glimpse of them, but they were far out of sight in the woods. Ted fought his way through the underbrush for a few yards, still looking for some sign of them, but they had gone. Some sneaking redskins had run off with his horse! He had been told that these Indians were fond of stealing horses, but it had never entered his head not to trust them. Raging silently, he set his lips and searched for hoof-marks in the soft ground. With all the skill he had learned from Cortez, Ted picked up the trail and followed. Through the brush, downstream toward the cabin, they led, but before the clearing was reached, the trail turned sharply to the south, and now he could tell by the spacing that the ponies were in full stride, probably over the hill by now. Anyway, he kept to his tracking and soon reached the edge of the woods. Still the marks led on across the flatlands and he followed doggedly. Up the high bank and around the bend they went, and there Ted stopped. Right in front of him was a tepee.

He dropped flat on his face without a second thought, crawled quickly to the edge of the bank and rolled over to hide under it. For just a moment he rested thus, listening to

find out if he had been seen. Now that he had come here, he was not just sure what he was going to do. That Indian had stolen his horse, sure enough, but would he give it back without making trouble? These natives could cause a lot of trouble for the traders if they wished. It would be well not to anger them too much. As he pondered his problem, he thought back to the stories he had heard of this habit of horse-stealing among the tribes on the plains. According to the teamster, Barkow, and to Corteau, it was not so much the horse that the Indians were after, it was the glory of the successful venture. In other words, it was a sort of game, to see who could steal the most horses from his enemy, neighbour, or anyone else. The more Ted thought about this, the more he realized that to go into the camp and make trouble was not the way to recover his pony. Then the answer came to him. Of course! The only thing to do! If the Indians respected a horse thief, then he would steal his horse back from them.

He went over in his mind everything Corteau had taught him of stalking. Very cautiously he raised his head above the bank, so slowly that even if a man had been watching, he would have not seen the boy move. The Stony camp consisted only of a single tent—obviously one family—and several fat, sleek ponies staked close by. But what held his attention most was the sight of his own horse just beyond the tent, even then being tied to a long rawhide thong. And doing the picketing was a young Indian boy, just about the same age as Ted.

"Horse thief!" muttered Ted between clenched teeth. "I'll break his neck, I'll put a ball right clean through—" and then the boy turned to walk back to the tepee. Something in his brown young face attracted Ted's special atten-

tion. He had the feeling that he had seen this Indian before.

The boy disappeared inside the tent. Then all was very still for some time, and Ted gathered himself for a long dash to his horse. If he could reach the pony, cut the rope and mount him before being caught, he could get away safely. He started over the top of the bank.

Just as he rose from his hiding-place, there came a loud noise from the tent, and two figures shot from the opening, running as fast as their legs could carry them. They raced away down the bank, almost leaping over Ted in their hurry. Ted froze. With his mouth open he lay still, waiting for the outcry.

But none came. They had been in too much of a rush to notice him in the grass. And fortunately the grass was very long. After the deep winter snow had lain on it for several months, it was flattened and bent, but between the clumps there was a network of narrow passages that Ted put to use. A glance down the hill told him at once that the two who had almost stepped on him had gone down to the river. He had plenty of time. Once again he could venture over the ledge, and now he was able to creep unnoticed into the nearest clump of grass. From here he made a long circle around the tent, and even as he passed it, there came other harsh noises and guttural dialect that made him stop breathing for moments, until everything was still again.

Slowly, very slowly, he advanced towards the horses. When he came to a particularly dry clump of grass, perhaps with withered leaves or buckbrush twigs on the ground, he would use one hand to scrape away a small patch of leaves, cleaning it down to the bare earth. Then, resting his hand back-down on the clear spot, he would bring his knee slowly and carefully up until it rested in the

cup of the palm. If he did not bother to clear the spot first, the weight of his knee would crackle and snap the leaves and twigs. The hand was placed to guide that knee to the exact spot before the other hand began to clear a place for the other knee. Thus, foot by foot and inch by inch, he crept close to the picketed horses.

For a moment he was afraid that the animals would take fright and rouse the Indians in the tent, but a low whistle from him served to quiet his own mount, and when it became still again, the others calmed down immediately. They watched his progress with mild brown eyes, not quite sure what this was creeping up on them, but recognizing the smell of a man, even though different from their own master. Ted's pony took a few short steps toward him until his low: "No, boy!" stopped it. He had come within six feet of them before he stopped crawling. Now for several minutes he lay absolutely silent and still, listening. From the tent came the grumble of voices, and wild animals cried out on all sides, but there came no sound or threat of danger. Ted slowly and carefully moved his arm to draw his knife from its case. He raised his head slightly until he could see the level of the surrounding prairie. Below him was the steep bank which he would have to avoid, but farther east the bank sloped gently down to the flats. This was the way of escape. As he rose to all fours, intending to dash in, cut his horse's halter-shank and vault to its back, he had an inspiration.

If these fellows wanted to play like that, very well, he would go along with the game. He sank into the grass again. By creeping close under the feet of the nervous but curious horses, he managed to cut all the ropes tethering the five horses, yet still hanging to all the ends. His own

horse he cut loose last; then, knife sheathed safely, he rose in a leap, grasped his pony's halter with his free hand, slid up onto its back and digging his heels sharply into the startled animal's sides, jumped it into a run towards the slope. The other horses, held by their ropes, followed willingly and the whole herd thundered away from the tepee, causing enough noise to arouse the occupants of the tent. These two, an old man and woman, ran out shouting questions that turned to screams of anger.

Through the cloud of dust, Ted caught a glimpse of the Indians dancing around and waving arms and guns, and as he dived over the bank there came the whine of a bullet, followed instantly by the sound of the shot. Within minutes he had charged over the crest and down into the bottom-lands, far out of effective range of the old guns. He turned his little stampede toward the creek where the cabin lay.

James MacDonnell and René Cortéau were just lifting a great pole to lay across the top of their gatepost when they heard the pounding of many hooves. They turned to stare at each other, each voicing the same exclamation "Indians!" They dropped the log and raced to the cabin, and before the timber had stopped rolling the men were inside the post, with the door barred and their rifles cocked. The horses broke into the clearing in a great cloud of dust and the rifles poked menacingly through the preholes. Then Cortéau caught sight of the rider.

"Hol' de fire!" he shouted to MacDonnell. They removed the guns from the holes and peered through. The horses had come to a sweating, sliding halt in the yard. A small figure jumped from one pony and quickly tied the horses to a post of the corral. Then he advanced toward the cabin. James threw open the door and stared at his son.

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Then came a bellow, half anger, half relief.

"Ted! What the devil —where did you get those horses? And what did we tell you about scaring the living daylights out of us like that? Do you know I almost shot you? Answer me, boy! Answer me!"

"W-e-ell, Father——" Ted began, his pride and confidence fading away fast, "I—you see—well——"

"Jus' wan minute, Jeem, yo' scare de boy, I'm t'eenk. Don' be too mad on leetle fellow like dat." Corteau stepped outside too.

"Well, Ted, what's the story?" asked James again more coolly.

"Well, Father, it's like this." Ted breathed easier now. "I was out riding up the river and I left my horse for a while and when I came back he was gone. But I saw this Indian riding off with him. So I——" and so the story came out, and both Corteau and MacDonnell were forced to admit that it had been well done when Ted told them of his following and recapturing of the horse. But the boy's father was worried about the outcome of it all. Still, the beggar did start it, didn't he? Ah well, the Indian horses could be returned. What concerned the man most was the fact that his son had been able to out-Indian the Indians. Something was going on that he didn't know about. And shaking his head, James followed the other two inside for the evening meal.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

JUST as James had expected, things began to happen. As a matter of fact they began to happen very soon. The next morning, almost before the white men were out of bed, there came a great racket from outside. The three sprang to the door with rifles held ready, only to find two half-naked figures standing by the corral shouting at the horses. Although the words were in Stoney, Ted and Corteau figured out enough to tell them that the Indians were trying to pick out their own stolen ponies from among those in the corral. At sight of the traders the two natives stopped their noise and turned to the post. They were the same pair who had run from the tepee and down the hill toward the river. One was a young boy and the other evidently his father.

The elder Indian padded forward with his son trailing fearfully behind. They stopped a few yards from the door. To their surprise the Indian spoke in very good English.

"White man! My son has lost a pony. I have lost three ponies. Our ponies are with your band. My son has a strange story to tell. He wishes to tell you his story." He pushed the frightened youngster in front of him as he spoke. The Indian boy stood for a moment, eyes downcast, scared but trying hard not to show it. His father nudged him.

"My father says I must tell you that I am sorry." The boy also spoke excellent English. "My father makes me say this. Yesterday I stole the white boy's horse." He pointed

slowly at Ted, staring him in the face. "I took this pony to my father's lodge, but while my father and I were away this white boy tracked me to our camp and stole his horse again. He stole my horse also, and those of my father." Now he hesitated, his lip quivering a little. "My father says we must have horses. I have come to buy our horses back." The boy stood where he was, looking at the ground, and in a moment MacDonnell realized what the bargain was.

"You mean," he asked, "that in return for these horses which my son stole—that is—captured from you, you would give me your own son?"

"The boy made the mistake," came the sad reply, "and he is all I have to give. He is my greatest possession." James felt rather foolish, but he replied after careful thought:

"I am a trader. We white men come into your land in peace. We do not wish to make trouble with our red friends. We admire the Assiniboine nation and their chiefs. We will be honoured to make your family a gift of friendship."

At this speech the Indian features lost their stern look, the dark eyes brightened a little. The boy looked up hopefully.

"I have many ponies in my band," James continued, sweeping the corrals with a wave of his arm. He understood the pride of the native, and his next statement was pure diplomacy. "As a token of my good will I offer you whichever four of these horses you care to choose."

There was not a soul present who did not realize what this meant. The Indian knew it was thus white man's way of returning the horses without making the trade. From this day on the three white traders would always be welcome among his people.

Ted was looking at the Indian boy. The lad smiled suddenly when he realized he was not being given away after all. Ted watched him closely. "Why," he thought to himself, "he's just a little boy, like me. And he likes to run in the woods and play like I do." He caught the boy's eye and winked very slowly. A shy, wide grin spread over the boy's face and he turned his eyes to the ground again, shifting his feet uneasily. In the meantime the men had walked over to the corral and were busy cutting out the strange horses. Ted stepped closer to the Indian lad and the two stood silently looking at one another.

"Haven't I seen you some place before?" Ted asked hesitantly. The boy raised his eyes. The two lads were of an equal height, and between them there was no barrier of colour or race. They were just two boys living in the same neighbourhood. Then the Indian's eyes flashed in recognition.

"Yes!" he said. "I have seen you, too. I think perhaps it was at the school." Now Ted remembered. The school last winter at Edmonton. He remembered the first day he had gone there. It was his first and last day because his father had already taught him more than was being studied in the school, so there had been no need for him to attend. It was in that tiny log classroom that Ted had seen this Indian boy. And on more than one occasion they had passed in the narrow streets of the fort. Ted knew that he belonged to a small band of Assinboines that wintered near the fort each year, earning a living by hunting for the Company and trading a few furs they managed to trap there. Meeting the lad here was almost like meeting an old friend. Within a few minutes the two were on the best of terms, wandering across the clearing toward the near-by stream.

Ted was the first to ask a question.

"I've got kind of an Indian name," he admitted shyly.
"Do you know what Sukanabi means?"

"Oh yes, I know. And you speak it very well for a white man. My name is too hard for you to say, but in English it is 'White Calf'. It is my first name."

"But I didn't know Indians had more than one name like we do."

"It's not exactly like your names," laughed the Indian lad. "You see, what I meant is that it is the first name I have had. When I am older I shall take another name—perhaps if I make good medicine, or do some brave deed or something like that. We change our names several times during our lives."

"That would be kind of funny," snickered Ted, "having two names. I'd get all mixed up and wouldn't know which one was which."

"Oh, it isn't as bad as that. Anyway, the Black Robes at Fort Edmonton have given us all new English names already."

"Do you go to Edmonton every winter?" asked Ted as they walked.

"No, not always. But my father likes to stay near the traders. He wishes to learn the ways of the white men so that our people may be as strong and as wise as the whites. My father says that your people will soon be coming into our country in large numbers and that we must learn to live in peace with them. That is why we learn your language and why we wish to buy guns and other white man's gear. He makes me go to the school so that I may speak English well."

"You speak our language as well as I do now," observed

Ted. "I wish I could learn Stony that well." By this time they were at the little creek and they turned to walk along the bank until they came to open land. Above them was the high bank, and tall against the sky on the hill rose the pointed shape of a tepee. Even as they looked a bustle of movement took place near it and in a jiffy another tripod of poles was raised. Before their eyes the bare skeleton was covered and another tent stood on the bench beside the first. Now there was activity all along the edge, for tent after tent rose against the sky until there were at least a dozen where only the one had stood an hour before.

"What's happening?" asked Ted, puzzled.

"The bands are gathering for the hunt," said his new friend. "They are building a village. When all the tribe has gathered and everything is ready we will go out onto the prairie and shoot many buffalo and trade their skins to the fur companies."

"But why do you camp here when the buffalo are so many miles away?"

"The great herds of buffalo have not yet come," the boy explained. "There is little water and no wood out on the plain, so we make a good camp here at Spitzee until our scouts see the buffalo coming. Then we all ride out and stay for as long as we can keep up with the herds."

"But I thought there were buffalo here all the time. Where do they go?"

"They follow the grass. In winter when snow covers the ground they move south to the plains where the grass is green and fresh, and in summer it is too hot for them down there so they come back where it is cooler and better for them."

"And you just wait for them each year?"

"Some tribes follow the herds wherever they go, but we have many enemies so we stay together in our own country. There are always some buffalo in the hills and around us here, but most of them go away. My father says that the white traders here are better than in some places, so we do our hunting in our own territory. It is a very fine place, thus Spitzee Anota."

"Oh yes," agreed Ted, "I think it's wonderful. What does 'Anota' mean?"

"It means 'country.' Spitzee Anota—Spitzee Country, that is all."

"Oh, look!" cried Ted, pointing to the bank above them. A long string of horses and riders was winding toward the growing camp.

"It is Broken Shield, our chief," declared the Indian proudly. "He is the mightiest hunter on the plains. He wears the necklace of claws from the great devil bear. He is a very brave man. He is a mighty hunter and warrior."

They stood quietly on the creek bank for a while, then Ted turned to the Indian.

"White Calf," he asked, "why did you take my horse yesterday?" For a moment the other lad seemed almost ashamed, then he replied:

"In this country we are a warlike people. When our hunters are not killing the buffalo, they go out and hunt our enemies. But we do not think so much of killing our enemies, it is like a game—like some of the games you white people play. Your men gamble for furs or for guns, but we gamble for horses. If we win, we are great men in our villages and we become famous. But if we lose, we lose our lives.

"We take a great joy in trying to creep into an enemy

camp and make off with all their ponies. Sometimes we will make bets with each other as to which ponies we will capture and then we take only those certain ones. If the enemy catches us, they may kill us. If we get away in safety then we become great warriors. Do you understand?"

"Oh, I understand that part all right, but my horse was not even guarded. Anybody could have taken him that way."

The Stony boy hung his head before he finally answered.

"I know that. But since I have been to the school at Fort Edmonton my friends make fun of me. They call me 'white boy' and tell me I cannot come with them, that I am no longer an Indian and can never be a great hunter. I thought that if I captured a horse—that they would stop laughing at me and let me go with them again." His head sank even lower at the thought. "And now, when they find out that a white boy has crept into our camp in daylight and stolen all our horses, I think it will be worse than ever."

Ted listened in silence as the miserable lad told his story. Then he had a grand idea.

"White Calf," he asked, "can you shoot a rifle?"

"I have never tried," admitted the other. "We have only one old gun in our lodge and my father will not let me use it."

"Good!" exclaimed Ted, laughing as his plan formed in his mind. "Then we'll show those poor friends of yours a trick or two."

"What do you mean?" asked White Calf, interested.

"I can get a rifle any time I want now," said Ted. "And tomorrow, if you come down to visit me, we can take it out into the woods and I'll teach you how to use it. It is a lovely

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gun and you can knock the tail off a rabbit at a hundred yards."

"That is a very difficult target to hit," said the Stony doubtfully, as he thought of the tiny white ball of fluff bouncing through the bush. His dark eyes flashed. "I will come! If you will teach me to shoot the rifle I will be your brother for ever. Is this a promise?"

"A promise!" declared Ted, holding out his hand. The two friends gripped hands tightly, gazing steadily into each other's eyes; and what each one saw there, he liked. A sound at the other side of the clearing drew their attention.

"Here comes your father now," said Ted as the older Indian came up with the horses. White Calf bounced onto the back of one and they rode off through the trees. The Indian lad raised a bare arm and called back to Ted.

"Tomorrow, Sukanabi! I will come at midday!"

"That'll be fine," shouted Ted, "I'll be waiting here."

Ted felt a warm glow of happiness spread through him as he turned toward the cabin. He had found a friend! Even though he had known the Indian for a few minutes only, he was sure that this friendship would last a lifetime. The boy walked home dreaming of the things he would learn in the days to come.

CHAPTER TWELVE

THE sun hung straight overhead next day when the two boys met as arranged. Ted carried Cortean's heavy long rifle, and across his shoulder hung the belt with powder horn, shot bag, and caps. Birds and small animals made a racket of twittering and squeaking as they walked through the woods towards the river. White Calf led Ted along a trail that was almost hidden by thorn bushes and grass. Only by bending almost double were they able to push their way through, but finally they came out into a tiny clearing beside the river. All along the way Ted had noticed his friend glancing back to look at the rifle and now they were alone he handed the gun to the other lad, saying:

"Here, White Calf, will you hold the rifle a minute? The sun is so hot I'm going to take my shirt off." And as the sun was indeed very hot for so early in the year, he began to strip. The Indian boy, taking the gun, gripped it tightly, thrilling to its touch, yet almost afraid of it. He watched as his white friend took off the cloth shirt, and noted with wonder that this boy's skin was tanned almost as dark as his own.

"There!" cried Ted as he flung the shirt across a low bush. "Now I feel lots better. If I had a breechclout like you I'd wear it instead of these hot trousers. Now we're ready!" Ted happily took up the rifle and proceeded to instruct White Calf in the art of loading and firing, just as he had learned from Cortean so many months ago. Nothing

was overlooked in this teaching—pruning, packing, cocking, aiming—and Ted laughed just as hard as Corteau had when the first shot knocked the Indian to the ground. After that it became merely a case of target practice. For the rest of the afternoon the lads took turns loading and shooting the old gun.

In three days the storeroom was finished and Ted found that he had some spare time. As soon as his morning chores were done he led his pinto out of the corral and rode up the hill to the Indian camp. As he rode over the crest of the bank he stopped to stare, for where one tent had been a few days before, now were several dozen, all the same shape and size and colour as far as he could tell. Somewhere in the middle of this forest of tepees was the lodge of White Calf's family. The problem was—where? While he sat on his pony wondering what to do, a yellow puppy dog ran out from behind the nearest tent and began to bark at him. The horse danced in annoyance and in an instant a score of other dogs joined in the chorus. With a sharp kick of his heels Ted jumped his horse through the pack of noisy mongrels and trotted toward the village. The barking of dogs had, however, aroused some Indian children and they ran out to see this stranger in their camp. Among them was White Calf. When Ted caught sight of his friend he halted, smiling. The native boy stepped quickly to the front of the crowd, striking at the dogs with a small bow he carried. With a few well-placed blows he sent the dogs yelping behind the tents, and only then did he look up at the white boy on the pony. A grin of pleasure spread across his face as he held up his hand, palm downwards in the traditional salute of peace. In English he said .

"Welcome, Sukanabi. Welcome to our home. I have

been waiting for you since we last parted. You must come and meet my family. My father will be pleased to see you again." So saying, he took the rope from Ted's hand and led the horse through the winding streets of the camp until they came to a tepee close by the edge of the bank. White Calf told him to dismount and they tied the horse to a stake by the tent. Asking Ted to wait, the Indian lad disappeared inside the tent. There came the sound of voices. As he stood beside the lodge Ted noticed several small, dark heads peeking around the sides of the other tents, and when he looked at them, the other children were watching him intently, too shy to show more of themselves but curious too, for this was the first white boy most of them had ever seen. Excited whispers passed from shelter to shelter and then White Calf came out of his father's lodge.

"My father wishes you to visit him," said the boy, erect and proud now in his own surroundings. "Will you come into our tepee and talk with him?"

"Why—yes—if it's all right." Ted's heart leaped at the thought. Not only was he excited but he was just a little bit scared. After all, he was alone in this huge camp of savages, and his father had told him not to go near the villages. But the urge was too strong. When White Calf held the flap open, Ted stepped inside. For a moment or two he could see nothing in the dim interior of the tepee, until his eyes became more accustomed to the light. Standing silently inside the tent, Ted let his eyes wander upwards where a hole at the peak of the lodge allowed the only light to come through. As he lowered his gaze other things became clear. Half-way up the inside of the tent there appeared to be some kind of inner lining, all covered with drawings in many bright colours. The lodge itself was about twelve feet

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across, and the same high, and the air inside smelled strongly of smoke and food mixed with the odour of skins and humans.

"We welcome you to our home, young trader," came a clear, deep voice from the other side of the tepee, and when Ted dropped his glance still lower, he could just make out the figures seated there against the far wall. The middle Indian he immediately recognized as White Calf's father who had come to trade his son for return of the horses. On one side of him sat an old man, on the other, a little distance apart, was a woman--evidently the boy's mother. Now the father continued "I know your English name, boy, but here we shall call you by the name which was given you, Sukanabi. My son tells me you were called this name when you came last summer. It is a good name, and we ask you to keep it."

"Oh, I like it very much!" Ted blurted, awed by the almost churchlike quiet of this lodge. "I'm——" and here he began to think of some impressive way to express himself, for the native Indian loves ceremony and fine words. "I am very much honoured to bear this—this title. I hope that we will become good friends, and that you will consider my father a friend also."

"Well spoken, white brother!" broke in the Indian boy. "I have told my father the good turn you have done me in teaching me to shoot the rifle. He says that I must treat you as a brother, and that our lodge is always warm to you and yours." The boy spoke a few words in his own language to his mother and she replied, handing something to her son. White Calf unrolled the little bundle and Ted gasped as it was handed to him. Unfamiliar though it was, he recognized it as the breechclout he had wished for a few days

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before. He fingered the soft deerskin, fringed and closely beaded in bright designs. He thought of the hours of labour it must have taken to make, for each bead was sewn to the skin separately and there were hundreds of the tiny glass beads on the garment.

"I—I don't know what to say——" he gasped. "I'll have to find something good to give you in return. We have lots of nice things at the post. Maybe my father will let me——" but here the elder Indian broke in. Up until now the old man had remained silent, and Ted supposed he did not understand English, but now he spoke in a thin, cracked voice that yet had the tones of authority.

"Sukanabi" he said, staring intently at Ted. "When one of our people makes a gift, it is given from the heart. Your father has shown us that he is a good man, and we welcome him to our country. This gift is for his son, and we welcome him also. If you would give a gift in return, that is well, but make it something from yourself, not common trade goods which can be bought for robes."

This speech was delivered in slow, halting English. Ted looked at the ground for a moment, then said

"I'm sorry I didn't know it was like that. I'll find something really worth while some day."

And then it was time to go outside again, for there was much to see in the camp. The two boys, mounted on ponies, trotted down the bank toward the river, and while White Calf waited in the woods, Ted borrowed the long rifle again and they took it to their clearing on the river bank.

As on the first day, Ted stripped off his shirt, and in a flash the new breechclout had replaced his trousers. With his healthy tan Ted could have passed for a native right

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then, except for his hair, which was too fair, and his eyes, which were blue. And so, with his knife at his thigh, moccasins on his feet and his hair tied back with a strip of bright cloth, he felt happier and stronger than ever before in his life.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

THIS year 1867 had no spring. At least not one that you could really call a spring. One day it was winter, and then all of a sudden, right before one's eyes, it was summer. Trees which had been bare and brown for the past few weeks, since the traders had come to Spitzee, now burst out in full leaf. Everywhere was the green of life. Ted had been so busy with his chores and his Indian lessons that he hardly noticed the change until it was all complete. It was late May, and the grass was beginning to turn from light to dark green as it grew longer. By now the whole south bank of the valley was dark with tents and lodges of the Indians. There was no more room near the crossing. It must have been because of this that some Indians began to pitch camp in the valley.

Ted rode over to watch their new neighbours as they settled in. Each family would arrive on horseback, sometimes two, and even three, on each animal. And almost every horse drew one of those strange things that White Calf told him were called 'travous'. On these contraptions were lashed the entire belongings of the family. Ted was particularly amused by the fact that it seemed to be only the women who did the actual work of building camp. And he was amazed at the speed and strength of these squaws. Some of them were quite old, but they lifted the long poles with ease and their quick, nimble fingers almost flew when they tied the first three poles together in typical Stony

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fashion, then, with no little effort, several of them managed to stand the tripod upright. When they had measured off the correct distance to fit their covering, more poles would be laid on the forks at the top and the bottom ends spaced properly around the circle. One pole only was left down, and this was fastened to the skin covering, which was spread flat on the ground. This last pole with one side of the tent firmly attached was then raised in its place and the covering wrapped around the skeleton, to be fastened with short wooden sticks to the other poles. Now Ted found the meaning of those rings of rocks that his father had told him were 'tepee rings.' On the bare prairie, where little wood may be had, the Indians could not cut stakes to hold down the bottom edge of the covering, so they formed the habit of placing large rocks all around the bottom to hold it down. Now, even though stakes could easily be cut, the rock method was so much quicker and easier that they did not bother to cut sticks. A score of heavy stones from the creek bed served this purpose.

Then White Calf explained that this idea was far better because the family made a regular habit of airing the tent, lifting the bottom edge upward and pinning it all around to leave a space where fresh air might blow through. For this, the rocks had only to be rolled off the skins and replaced when it was time. Stakes were just too much trouble. When the tent was taken down, the rocks were rolled off and simply left where they lay, forming a large ring to mark the site. The entire valley and the tops of the benches were covered with these rings. Ted grew dizzy at the thought of how many tents had been pitched in this place during the past years.

For the next few days there was little activity in the val-

ley. Those Indians who had camped near the post were the last stragglers of the tribe, for no more tents were erected. A few young men, alone and in twos or threes, wandered into the camps to take up their dwellings, but the scene grew very quiet. Most of the natives had not seen very much of the white man's magic, guns and other trade stuffs, so they spent a great deal of time squatting around the clearing, hoping for a chance to trade beaded skins and other small items for whatever they could get. Their chief want was tobacco, and this MacDonnell was pleased to offer in return for beautifully made moccasins and deerskin coats. Although no pelts of great value passed over the counter, still they were content, knowing that this good will they were building would pay them well when the hunt came.

The dirty banks of snow that still lay about in the deep woods were almost gone when the first rain fell. It was not much of a storm, to be sure, but it made the day dull and miserable, and showed signs of staying for some time. It started about midday, and was still coming down lightly when darkness fell. The next day it was still the same, but the sky began to grow dark as storm clouds piled up to the west. Then, almost as though at a signal, the Indians began to grow restless and nervous. Their glances went often to the sky, and then to the ground, and their lazy attitudes disappeared.

As the sky darkened, the movements of the natives gained speed. No longer did they sit under the trees, even though the rain let up. Suddenly, as Ted watched from the doorway, a group of squaws went to a near-by tepee and with great haste tore it down. The skin cover was whipped off to expose the naked poles of the frame, and almost in the same instant these poles were torn from their places,

piled in disorder wherever they happened to fall. Almost before he knew what was happening, the rest of the tents were down, and in short order were being packed. Even before the last skin was off, the first family and their luggage were moving out. Within minutes there was a long winding line of riders moving out of the valley and winding up the steep banks, though the rain was beginning again.

MacDonnell was amazed at this action. Corteau could not seem to understand either. James called out to a brave who hurried past:

"Two Knives!" he said in broken Stony, "what is it that makes your people go from your white friends?" And the Indian replied

"It is not the white man my people run from, it is——" and here he lapsed into pure Assiniboine that the whites could hardly understand.

"SOOK-tah!" the native said, pointing at the sky, "SOOK-tah, ah-ki-YIM! Ah-ki-YIM! Pok-sah-POO!" This cry was taken up by the few Indians that were still left, and they pointed excitedly to the sky and to the west. Then they were gone. The post in its clearing was deserted save for the three whites.

"What'd he say about water?" asked James.

"Injun bees say somet'ing about plenty water comin', mebee she's gone rain some more, eh? By gar, eef Corteau go on de desert, nex' day she's come de flood!" Corteau stamped away into the fort and Ted was left with his father. For the first time, the boy spoke. "I think he meant more than just rain, Father." James looked at his son sharply, asking:

"What do you mean, lad? Did you understand what he said?"

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"Aye, Father, I understood him. He said that an awful lot of water was coming here, but he pointed to the hills. Do you think the river could rise this high?"

"It might be possible," admitted his father, "but I doubt it. But look there!" He pointed to the brow of the banks, where even then tepees were being raised. "Our friends didn't go very far. They probably think the ground will be too wet to camp down here, what with all this rain. Well, we'll see in the morning."

By this time the weather had settled down to a steady grey blanket of drizzle, and MacDonnell, standing by the door, said:

"Lad, this is almost like our Old Country weather. It's what a Scotsman would call a Scotch Mist. I can't see much of a threat in this sprinkle." They lit the tallow lamp and began the task of getting supper, for with the closing in of the weather it had grown quite dark. With a cheery fire and a hot meal to brighten them up, the three traders were comfortable, and as soon as things were in order they went to bed.

Ted woke in the half-light of very early morning. Somewhere a coyote yelped and friends barked in sympathy, then silence smothered everything. Birds still slept in the trees, for no song broke the stillness, and yet, as he lay half awake, half asleep, a stirring musical note beat in the boy's mind. He tried to recognize the sound, certain that it was familiar. As he dozed, he imagined himself back at York Factory, with the unhurried bustle of morning trade, and he saw again the stately supply ship warp in to the jetty while dancing waves slapped and gurgled against its wooden sides.

Ted's eyes flew wide open. Half-sitting, he strained his

ears to the sound, and next instant was on his feet, racing for the door. The noise as he slammed open the trade window brought Cortean and James out of their beds.

"Ted!" barked MacDonnell, reaching for his rifle as Cortean struggled into trousers and grabbed for his own weapon. "Ted, lad! What is it?"

"The river!" yelled Ted, his voice high with excitement, "the river!" The three of them stood crowded in the doorway, staring out into early morning greyness. Above them the sky showed a solid ceiling of blue; but from wall to wall, the entire valley, except for the land where the cabin stood, was a sea of swirling yellow water.

"It's come up a foot while I've been watching it," said Ted, eyes glued to the water.

"Well, we'd better get out of here as fast as we can," James snapped, turning to roll his blankets. Ted jumped to help.

"Jecm, mon ami," called Cortean, "I do not t'eenk we can mak' de high fan'. De creek, she's pretty high, an' de reever on odder side, she's planty fas' I t'eenk better we put de stuff up high an' ourself too. Dis valley, she's wide wan. I don't t'eenk we get much water here. What you say, eh?"

"Maybe you're right, René. I guess we wouldn't stand much of a chance of crossing the river to the north bank, and from the looks of it that creek is about ten feet deep now. We'd have quite a job trying to find a shallow place when everything is covered with this dirty water. Let's put the powder and furs up on the roof. The rest of this stuff won't hurt to get a bit wet, and the flood can't last very long. There must be a crest. Up on the roof, son, and we'll hand the things to you." He lifted a small keg of gun-

powder and carried it outside. Ted followed, and in a moment had jumped up, caught the edge of the roof, and was standing on the low side. Corteau and MacDonnell handed him bales of furs, clothing, and other goods which could be damaged by water. Furniture, cooking utensils and metal trade items they left in the cabin, hoping the logs would stay together against the current when it rose.

By the time the last box was stacked on the sod roof, the water had risen to the doorsill, and with their last hurried errands, the traders splashed through it. They stopped outside the door to plan their own escape. Now, on all sides, the clearing was a level sheet of water, brown and sticky. Small bushes bent under the flow, dipped their crowns, and disappeared. Logs and sticks bobbed in slow procession, and small dead animals floated by.

"The trees!" cried Ted, "maybe we can climb the trees till it goes down."

"Good idea!" approved his father, "let's pack our own and get there as fast we can."

"Father!" cried Ted, suddenly, "what about the horses?"

"Great Scott!" MacDonnell shouted. "We forgot the horses. René! What can we do about them?"

"Nom de nom, my fren', de only ting w'at we can do for dose horst I t'eenk, is for let heem go. Dat geeve heem de chance for swim to de shore, anyhow. Dis way he's got no chance at all. I t'eenk I turn my horse loose from de corral, me."

"Mine, too!" shouted Ted, and dashed ahead through the shallow water to the gate of the corral. He had the pole out and down before Corteau reached him, and the two then drove their frightened ponies out into the swirling

water. Here the animals stood, trembling, not knowing what was going on.

"Well, I guess that's about all we can do for them now," said James. "If the water gets too high, they can make their way out better than we can. If it doesn't get too bad, they'll probably stay around. Come on, let's get going."

They waded out into the rolling water, and with each step it grew deeper until even the men were waist deep before they reached their trees. With much grunting and scrambling they managed to climb above the water into the larger branches, where they sat for a moment to catch their breaths. Over by the river, where the main current was roaring, Ted saw the top branches of a large tree began to sway. As he climbed higher, he could look out over the tops of the bushes, and now the tree by the river began to lean and shudder, as though some giant hand were tearing at it. In a moment it went down, burying branches and all in a flurry of yellow foam. Trunk and roots riding high, the forest monarch began slowly to move. Faster and faster it went, as the current caught it, sliding and twisting to the boil of the rapids.

From his perch in the tree, Ted could look out over the whole valley, and everywhere he looked, there was water. The whole river-bed was filled. Through the bushes and trees he could see driftwood piling up, and on all sides small trees bent and were forced under by the weight of the flood. Ted watched as it crept up the log wall of the post, lapped at the sill of the window and poured over to join the rising water outside. For several hours the humans clung to their trees, and at midday, when the sun was high up, the river ceased to rush and roar. It lay almost silent, moving sluggishly downstream, with only the little swirl behind

each tree or bush to mark the direction of the current.

Wearily the traders stuck to their branches through the rest of the afternoon. As the sun crept close above the mountains, Cortéau suddenly called out:

"Hey, Jeem! Ted! De water, she's stop! By gar, she's don' come up no more in de las' half-hour, I bet you! I be watch heem all de time. Dat's good, eh?"

Sure enough, when they checked it for the next little while, the water did not move any higher.

"Well, I guess this is the peak," sighed James, much relieved. He was glad to see that it did not come within two feet of the roof of the cabin, and there had not been enough current here to do any real damage to the building.

"What do you think, René?" James called across the water to the tree where Cortéau sat. "Do you think we can go down soon, or shall we stay up here all the night?"

"Name of a little blue pig!" swore the Frenchman, "cet Cortéau say cet once, he's say cet ten t'ousan' time. I spit on de water! You seller go down cef yo' like. I'm stay right here w're I'm be leetle beet dry. I'm stay here till I'm fall out dis tree."

"All right, René!" laughed James, "I guess you're right. The water might rise some more before morning anyway. Ted, did you hear that? We'll have to stay in the trees all night. Are you all right?"

"I'm fine, Father," called Ted. "I've got a good branch under me and it isn't very cold out. How does René like it?"

"He's not very happy," his father shouted back. "Hang on until daylight, Son. It should be dropping by then."

Ted climbed to a more comfortable seat on the branch and settled himself in a crotch with legs straddling the

bough. Darkness came suddenly and the last he remembered was the sight of a great bird, low over the water, sailing on silent wings.

Magpies screeching near by brought Ted out of his sleep. He blinked in the sunlight and stared out at the water, trying to remember where he was. A lone magpie, flying directly overhead in its search of flood victims, made him aware of his position. Immediately he shifted his hold so that he could look at the cabin. The wall showed a dark band of moisture nearly a foot wide.

"By gar, Jeem! She's drop, de water," shouted Corteau, and Ted called back:

"Yes, nearly a foot. And look, it's still going down." As they watched the wet mark widened slowly. One by one the logs appeared out of the water, and as the morning passed, in spite of rumbling stomachs, they grew cheerful. By noon the ground showed and Ted slid quickly down the trunk and ran splashing through the puddles to the cabin. James followed, but Corteau remained where he was. He stayed there until the water had disappeared from the clearing.

When Ted and James entered the cabin the water had gone, the flood was over, but what a mess it had left! Everywhere the water had touched was covered with a coating of yellow-brown, slimy mud. Pots and pans and furniture had to be scraped and washed before it was possible to use them. The well was filled with the muck, giving Ted the job of bailing all the water out, cleaning out the mud, and patiently waiting for it to fill before bailing out again. It took a dozen good cleanings before the water that slowly seeped back in was fit to drink. Their next thought was of food, and this was quickly rescued from the roof, along with dry clothes. Driftwood that had caught in near-by

bushes was gathered for firewood, even though much of it was still soaked and not of much use. With a fire roaring in the fireplace, the cabin soon began to smell strongly of stale mud and the coating of silt cracked as it dried, chipping off in large scales.

Though René was still up in his tree, the two MacDonnells split the chores between them and the cabin was soon back in shape for living again. The next job was to find their horses, which had disappeared during the night. They had no sooner finished cleaning up the post, however, when two Indians rode up through the wet woods. With them they brought the lost horses.

"I wouldn't have believed it if I hadn't seen it!" exclaimed James when the visitors had gone. "Imagine, Indians bringing back horses."

"They hadn't captured the horses," explained Ted. "They were returning them to us because we are their friends." James looked at the boy thoughtfully for a moment, but said nothing.

As the smoke and smell of food drifted across the clearing, Corteau haled them from his tree.

"Hey, Ted, Jecm! De groun' she's dry yet?"

"Dry as a duck's back. Come on down and have some dinner."

"Don' say no more," begged the Canadian. "By gar, Corteau he's so hungry hees stomach she's t'ink de t'roat ees cut." He slid quickly down the trunk and almost ran to meet them. Half-way to the cabin he began to call to them, and as he approached he was beaming with good humour.

"Sacre bleu!" he bellowed, "dat's wan time ol' Corteau fool de water. See—I'm be dry like ever't'ing. I don't even touch de water w'en I'm come down, likr yo' feller do. De

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sun she's dry de boot, de sock, an' look de pant. Dry, eh boy?"

"Pretty nice," commented Ted. "Come on in the house, dinner's ready. Watch out for the boards, they're pretty slippery with the mud." As he said this there came a loud noise from Corteau, who had just stepped upon the boards in front of the door.

"Whoo-oo-oo-oop!" he howled, and the crash of his landing jarred every log in the cabin. If his first yell had not been loud, his next certainly was. In all the clearing there was only one puddle left from the flood, in the shallow trench from which they had taken sod for the roof. The boards he had slipped on were beside this. He landed flat on his back in four inches of sticky yellow muck.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

Ted's fourteenth birthday was only a few weeks away when the last of the flood waters had disappeared. The river dropped back to its normal level, and the creek by their cabin grew smaller and smaller with the coming of midsummer. The tents that had been moved before the flood now had been replaced in the valley, closer to water and wood. Even the small bit of trading that had taken place during these first months had brought in a good supply of furs, but now the Indians were lined up before the post, anxious to buy powder, caps, and lead for their old muzzle-loaders, and ammunition for the few breech-loading rifles they had. Steel skinning knives went out to almost every Indian, and the supply was almost gone before they were satisfied. They were getting ready for the great drive.

It was while this rush was on that the American traders came to the post. Six of them rode in early one morning, and from the cut of them Ted found it very easy to figure out why they had left their own country. To him every one of the men appeared to be a fugitive from the law. Faces covered with dirty beards, clothes ragged and filthy, they made even Corteau look like a gentleman. The Indians regarded them with great distrust, and soon the trading had stopped. Only the white men were left at the post.

Their leader was a large, wind-burned man named Lafe Taggert, and he called out the names of each of his men,

who were interested only in the piles of furs on the floor of the cabin. A young man wearing blue breeches with a yellow stripe down the seams, was Ford, and his partner was Arnold Jukes, who had only two fingers on his left hand. Both of these men wore the large floppy hat of the U.S. Cavalry. An older man, white-bearded and nearly bald, was called Smoky, and Billy Wilson seemed to be the kind of man who didn't care whether he was introduced or not. The only one of the bunch who offered to be friends was Allard, and his first words were:

"Kind of a bad place for a youngster, ain't it?" looking at Ted.

"Oh no, it's a good place here," said Ted, wondering at the show of concern in this ruffian.

"Never mind the talk," ordered Taggert, "we got to get movin'. We're up here to build a post somewhere along the line. Hear there's right good trading to be done hereabouts. That right?"

"Depends on what you trade with," answered MacDonnell. "We've had good luck so far. Should be room for more posts."

"What's this place up the river where thishere Medicine Tree is supposed to be? That oughta be a good place for a fort, eh?"

"Well, the Indians won't let you build close to the tree. This is the best place we could find near by."

"We'll build where we want!" snarled Taggert. "Ain't no Injun gonna tell me where I'm buildin'. There's enough o' us here to rule the whole country, with the guns we got. Ever seen one like this?"

From his saddle scabbard he drew a shining rifle, handing it to James MacDonnell took it slowly, and Corteanu

stepped close to have a look. It was a short, light gun, with a large breech, evidently one of the latest.

"Maynard," snapped Taggart. "Breech-load. Make your own ca'tardges out of paper. Takes new kind of caps, too, see here." He pointed to a small box on the side of the weapon, from which a strip of paper stuck out. "Paper caps," explained the man. "Load her up, flip up a cap, fire, load, flip up a cap, that's all there is to it. Got half a dozen of 'em here. Can shoot twenty Injuns while they're loading once." He broke off with a hearty laugh. Corteau eyed the gun closely.

"You got some more dese gon, eh?" he asked.

"Six more in the wagon," replied the newcomer. "Why?"

"I t'eenk I like dis gon, me. W'at yo' want for one, eh?"

Taggart stared at the Frenchman. His eyebrow raised slightly.

"Why d'you want one of these?" he asked. "What's the matter with yo'r own gun?"

"All muzzle-loaders, except mine, and it's hard to get shells for," James explained for René. He had been trying for some time to get his friend to buy a new rifle, and now seemed to be the chance. "What'll you take for it?"

"Wal now, we got them rifles for our own use. Hardly seems right to give 'em away." He turned to his friends. "What d'you say, boys?"

"I like that there pony there," came the voice of one. "I'll give 'im my rifle for it."

"But that's my pony!" cried Ted. "René's is over there."

"Too bad, but I like this one. Take it or leave it."

Ted looked appealingly to Corteau, and knew instantly that the woodsman had never wanted anything in his life

as he wanted that rifle. But when Corteau looked at Ted, he shook his head.

"No no, leetle fren'. Dat's pretty good horse, dere. Ol' Corteau don' need de gon. De ol' long wan, she's planty good."

Ted made up his mind in that instant.

"Give me the rifle and some caps," he told Taggert. "You can have the pony." Corteau tried to stop the bargain, but James said:

"Let the boy alone, René. We'll see what kind of a trader he is. We can always get him another horse from the Indians. I guess it's time he got a gun of his own." There was a note of envy in the father's voice, though, and his eyes strayed to the new rifle as it was unpacked from the wagon-load of supplies these men had brought. But it wasn't the rifle that held his attention for long. Something he saw in the wagon made him take a step forward.

Before he could ask any questions, the wagon was again covered and the men, with Ted's pony in tow, moved away.

"Be seein' you fellers," called back one, the man Allard, and they passed out of sight in the brush. MacDonnell turned to Corteau.

"René! Did you see what I saw in that wagon?"

"Kegs!" nodded Corteau. "Yo' know w'at dat mean, Jeem!"

"Aye, that I do, man. Whiskey!" he stared at the bush where the others had disappeared. "Now there'll be nothing but trouble in Spitzee Anota. Whiskey and guns and violating the natives' holy ground. The boy may need his new gun after all."

But Ted was not to use his new rifle. As soon as he had closed the log gate of their corral, he went straight over

to Cortneau and held out the Maynard.

"Here, René," he said, "I'll trade you this one for your old gun. You want this rifle, and I'd like your long gun. Is it a deal?" Cortneau stammered and spluttered for a moment, but all his thoughts were on the new gun. He reached out to take it, and the boy gave it to him.

"By gar, leetle sparrow, dat's pretty good gun, da. Mebbe you want I gerve yo' knife or somet'ing too?"

"No," replied Ted, "just your old rifle and shooting belt. Maybe a horn of powder and some caps, but that's all. I'd rather use the old kind, I think."

James looked on in silence at the transaction, not knowing what to think. His little boy had grown up in the past year. Ted picked up the old gun, his own now, and set off through the woods towards White Calf's tepee.

He had not seen his Indian friend since before the flood, and he wondered what might be going on in the camp.

The barking dogs announced him long before he reached the tent, and White Calf met him at the door. Ted had stopped long enough in the woods to change into his breech-clout, and the two lads, almost as alike as twins, at once set off through the village on an errand for the Indian lad's father. They made their way through a forest of tents, ducking around skin-drying racks, cooking fires, and other things that cluttered the camp. As he ducked behind one tepee, Ted's foot struck the pole of some kind of platform, and the whole thing began to fall. White Calf jumped to catch it and set it up again, at the same time warning Ted to be careful.

"This is a very precious thing," he explained. "The owner would be very angry if it were to fall on the ground."

"What is it?" asked Ted, examining the object. It ap-

peared to be a bag made of buffalo skin, filled with a number of loose things.

"It is his medicine bundle. He is the wise man of our band. It is very bad medicine to hurt this thing." White Calf carefully braced the platform again, and the two lads went on their way.

With their little job done, they had time to wander about the big camp, and it was near the crest of the hill that Ted noticed the strange-looking little houses that made him ask: "What on earth are those tiny lodges?" They went over to them.

These lodges were some distance apart, on the very brink of the bank, and were made of long willow sticks firmly planted in the ground and bent over to form the roof. A very small door gave entrance, and was covered by a grass mat.

"These are sweat lodges," explained White Calf. "Our people use them very much. When the body is filled with evil spirits, one goes into the sweat lodge and in a short time the evil spirits rush out and go away. It is very good."

They opened one of the doors and peered inside. Ted could see that the lodge was dug part way into the ground almost like a bathtub, and lined with stones.

"How do you use it?" he asked.

"I will show you," offered the Indian. "A sweat bath will do you good. It is a good feeling."

"Will it hurt?" asked Ted.

"No, it takes away pain." The boy ran to a near-by fire and put a few sticks on it to make it blaze up. Then he placed several stones close beside the hot ashes.

"First we must get some water," he told Ted, and they went to find a large bowl. With this filled with water, Ted

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was then told to enter the lodge. He crawled into the dark hollow and took the bowl as it was handed to him.

"Watch out for the hot stones," warned White Calf, and his words were followed by a smoking rock which he pushed into the shelter. Ted looked at the rock in wonder. What was he to do now?

"Take off your breechclout and give it to me," commanded his friend outside, and Ted untied his garment and handed it out. Then came the order:

"Now pour a little water on the hot stone" Ted tipped his bowl above the rock and when the water poured out, a great cloud of steam leaped upwards, spluttering and hissing.

"More!" called White Calf. And Ted poured on some more. Now the lodge was filled with steam, and Ted began to feel rather warm. In a moment he began to sweat, and it was quite clear to him why this was called a sweat lodge. Then the door was opened a little and another hot stone was thrust in. Again he dropped water on it, and again the room filled with steam, and the perspiration rolled down his body in streams.

For half an hour this continued, and when the last stone had been wetted and the last drop of water used up, Ted sat in the darkness while a strange feeling of calmness and relaxation flowed over him. He breathed deeply and rubbed his arms and legs, feeling the muscles under his brown skin. This was certainly the life. Oh, to be an Indian!

"Come out quickly!" the voice of White Calf told him. "Quickly!"

"Do I have to?" yawned Ted, feeling very sleepy and comfortable.

"Yes," called the Indian, "it is part of the treatment."

Ted reached for his breechclout as it was handed in, and then pushed aside the mat door and crawled out. The coolness of the breeze made goose pimples pop out all over him, but in a few moments he was dry and warm in the sun. The fresh air felt wonderful now, and he was wide awake.

"Say, that's really nice, isn't it?" he said to his friend.

"Yes, we use the sweat lodges all the time. It is a good thing you took one now, because in a day or two you would not have the chance. All the hunters take a sweat bath before they go out on the prairies, and we should be going soon. We are getting ready for the Sun Dance."

"Sun Dance!" exclaimed Ted, immediately interested. "Isn't that where the braves dance around a pole and try to pull ropes out of their backs, or something?"

"No, that is the Blackfoot Sun Dance," replied White Calf. "The Stony Sun Dance is much different. It is a time of feasting and rejoicing. But first we go on a great buffalo hunt to get meat for the feasts. You should see the hunt. Oh, Sukanabi, it is wonderful!" And the native boy's dark eyes shone with his excitement.

"I sure wish I could go with you," sighed Ted wistfully. "I don't suppose my father would let me, though."

"I will ask my father to ask him to let you come," suggested White Calf. "I know you would be welcome, and I will lend you one of my father's horses."

"Oh, I think I could get Corteau's pony," said Ted, happily dreaming of the possibility.

"But these horses must be especially trained to run buffalo," replied the other boy. "They are very special horses, and very fast. I will ask my father to visit your

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father tonight." They went straight to the tent, where he did just as he had promised.

Ted then remembered that he had just bought the old rifle, and after he broke the good news to White Calf the two made off for the river as fast as they could go, for now they could practise any time they wished.

While they were gone White Calf's father rode down to the post and gravely explained that inasmuch as Ted, or Sukanabi as they called him, was a brother of White Calf, and a member of the tribe, the boy should be allowed to accompany his Indian brother on the buffalo hunt. In the end James gave his consent. The Indian then smiled widely and held out his hand. The two men began to understand each other then, and MacDonnell brought out two long clay pipes and a twist of tobacco. For some time they sat by the cabin, smoking quietly and talking about their sons like a couple of old cronies. And in the cabin Cortean polished his Maynard, made up a box full of paper cartridges and checked the rolls of paper caps.

Everybody at Spitzee was happy that day. Even the newcomers upstream were happy. They had found the ideal site for a fort and were almost singing as they unloaded a score of tightly bound wooden kegs. If there was trouble elsewhere in the world, there was no sign of it in Spitzee Anota.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

Ted and White Calf were standing on the north bank, high above the little spring where the white men had camped on their first night at Spizee, when they saw the signal. At first Ted was not sure he had seen it, not until White Calf pointed it out and they had watched it for a few minutes to be certain. Sure enough, far out on the height of land to the eastward someone was flashing a mirror. At regular times the bright reflection sparkled like a tiny star in the distance. White Calf was the one who moved first.

"The buffalo are coming!" he cried, leaping to the back of his pony. Ted hardly had time to mount before the Indian lad was jumping his little horse over the crest and down the hill. Across the grassy flats they raced, Ted trailing by a hundred feet, and it was only as they started up the far bank that he was able to catch his friend. Together they galloped into the Indian camp. But the news had come faster than they, for everywhere in the village men and women were busy. The signal had been sighted from here and some of the tepees were down already. All the younger men would take to the hunt, leaving only a few of the older braves, with most of their women, in this camp. A few of the lighter tents would go with them, as well as the stronger squaws to put them up and do the work.

While the Indians continued their packing Ted thundered down into the valley to tell his father. He burst into

the post entirely out of breath, and began throwing things into a buckskin bag even before he could speak. His father and René Corneau did not have to be told what was happening. They had been expecting this for many days now, and they silently helped the boy gather his gear. There was not much to pack.

A few articles of clothing, a canister of powder, several small boxes of caps, and a ten-pound bag of balls already cast, and he was ready. MacDonnell gazed after his son with anxious eyes. This was the first time the boy had ventured anywhere alone, and he was beginning to worry already. He knew that no harm could come to the lad while he was with his Indian friends, but just the same, it was a dangerous country for a young boy. Ted's mind never even touched on this idea, for all his thoughts were on the coming adventure.

As he trotted into the camp again the hunting party seemed to be ready, so he fell in beside White Calf without a word. A few minutes later they moved off, forming a long single line along the edge of the hill. For several miles they kept up this slow pace, held back by the trailing travois, but some of the more active members began to spread out ahead—some as scouts, and others in eagerness. After two hours of travel along the south bank of the old river-bed, they cut sharply down into the bottom-lands and crossed over to the north bank. Once again they followed the bank, but when it turned directly south they left it and struck out across the prairies, heading directly eastward.

As they topped a slight rise of land, Ted looked back. This was the true prairie, brown and dry, and this was buffalo country. On all sides were the white skeletons of long-dead animals, and also all around were fresh signs of

live ones. Ted rose as high as he could on the horse, hoping to catch sight of a buffalo.

By mid-afternoon, as they were coming into a series of low hills, the first buffalo was sighted. It was a lone bull, mean and wild, and he charged away as soon as he caught sight of the party. He was too far away and too old to bother with, but Ted had never been so excited. He was all for racing after it, until White Calf told him to be patient, that they would see many more before long. Just before sundown they rode up to a chain of hills that thrust up out of the flat plain like miniature mountains. On the tops of these hills, three in all, waited several Indians. These were the scouts who had camped on this high point for the last few weeks, waiting to flash word of the first herds of buffalo to come in sight to the south. Darkness fell before Ted could have a good look around, but by the light of small buffalo-dung fires the women erected the tepees and started their cooking. While the squaws went about their chores, the hunters squatted around these smudges and planned the hunt.

The buffalo were on the way from the vast southern plains, moving slowly and steadily northward. These hills, aptly called the Buffalo Hills, formed a gateway to the prairie. To the east, the Indian boy explained to Ted, there was a great body of water, and the land around it, between it and the hills, was rough and boggy. The best route lay across the flatland they had just crossed, between these hills and the Spitzee River. All they could do now was wait and watch for the first arrivals. Then the hunt could begin.

Ted did not see much of the camp that night. By the time they had settled in and had a meal of tea and pemmican, it was time for sleep, and the whole camp turned in except

two or three young men who stationed themselves behind hummocks at certain places on the three hills. From these outposts the whole countryside could be watched clearly, and no enemy or other living thing had much chance of surprising them during the night. In his excitement, Ted had no thought of trouble or attack, for his sleeping hours were filled with charging buffalo and racing horses. He slept side by side with White Calf, in the latter's tepee, with seven other Indians, all part of the family.

It seemed to Ted that he had hardly closed his eyes before someone was shaking him and calling him to wake up. All the Indians were rising and breakfast was being prepared. He got up, watched to see what the others were going to wear, then dressed himself only in breechclout and moccasins. The day was very hot already, and they would no doubt be much warmer before it was over. As soon as he came out of the tent, the boy went to the edge of the hill and searched the distant plain for sight of any activity. His disappointment must have shown a little in his face, for White Calf came up to him and pointed southward. There, far down on the horizon, almost a part of the landscape, he caught sight of a brownish cloud. For a moment this did not seem very important to him, but then he realized that it must be a cloud of dust thrown up by the hooves of a great herd. Ted could hardly eat his morning meal, but somehow he found that he was ready when the hunters began to mount.

"It is a large herd," White Calf told him as they moved off single file down the hill. "We will meet the leaders today and kill a few, and then follow them back to camp. Each day we will kill more, and then they will be here. When they reach this place we will not have to leave the

hill for they will take many days to pass. It is very great sport at first, but soon becomes work. There are a lot of other hunters after them, too."

"How do you know that?" asked Ted.

"When the buffalo are moving by themselves, they travel very slowly, and do not make the dust rise. But when they are hunted and stampeded, they make the great yellow cloud which you see now. It is another hunting camp like our own, probably Blackfeet."

"Will there be trouble when we meet?" Ted wanted to know.

"We will not meet," assured the Indian lad. "The people of the Plains Tribes have rules for war and for hunting, and we do not trespass on each other's hunting-grounds. The Blackfeet will chase the herds only so far, and we shall pick them up from there and chase them on north to the place where the Sarcees and Crees live. It is not the season for war." This seemed so logical to Ted that he could think of no more questions, and the party, a hundred strong, wound across the flats toward the now clear horizon.

All that day they travelled across the prairies, crossing the trails of other hunting parties, some of them very old, and some quite fresh.

Far to their right, to the west, the purple mountains appeared only as low hills, so great was the distance, and nowhere in sight was there a tree, nor any sign of there ever having been one on this vast ocean of grass. They camped the first night on another low hill, rolled in their blankets and robes, for the tents had been left behind in the care of a few older men. Supper consisted of dried meat, washed down with scalding, black tea. Before they turned in this time, though, the hunters spent some time checking

their weapons, laying out shot, filling powder horns, and checking their supplies of caps. Knives and spears were whetted on stones, and those who still used bows and arrows were busy with new strings and rebounding points; and the whole camp indulged in the luxury of a sweat bath in a quickly built lodge. The next day would be a busy one.

No one had to waken Ted this morning. For half the hours of darkness he had lain awake, waiting for the first light of day. Now he was up before the others, tugging at White Calf's arm, calling him to hurry. And then the whole camp seemed to explode in a flurry of activity. The same dried-meat-and-tea meal was eaten as quickly as possible, and within half an hour of daybreak they were riding out. An hour later the scouts came racing back from their post on a near-by ridge. The buffalo were not two miles away.

Now the kind of buffalo hunt these Indians planned did not require any stealthy stalking or creeping up within range. The hunters, for the most part, were young men, looking for excitement and danger. And their method of hunting provided all the thrill one could want. Ted was plunged into the chase without even a warning. At first report of the herd, the entire band continued south for a little while, then cut directly west, moving in behind the lead group of buffalo. When they cut their quarry's trail, plainly marked on the prairie, they turned to follow, breaking into a sort of jagged, running charge. As they topped the next ridge, the leading hunters halted, waiting for the rest to come up so that every man should have the same chance. Ted caught first sight of the animals as he and White Calf reached the main party.

The ridge the hunters stood on was only a slight rise of

land, sloping gradually away to the north and west, and this slope was almost black with the great beasts. Ted had never seen so many animals in one gathering, had never dreamed there could be so many of anything. The herd spread out fan-wise across the grasslands, moving slowly, cropping the high grass and wandering steadily along. Far out, on each side of the main herd, stood lone animals, huge and wise, sentinels for the rest. And even as he noticed them, the nearest one threw up his head and gazed up the slope towards the hunters.

Just exactly what he said to the others, Ted could not know, but the whole bunch started to move faster, and on this signal the Indians charged down upon them, rifles and spears held ready. For just a moment Ted and White Calf sat their horses and watched, it being the first hunt for both lads, but at the calls of their comrades they plunged down the slope on the heels of the rest.

Now the day was filled with thunder as horses bore rapidly down on slow-starting buffalo. While a buffalo can run as fast as an express train when he wants to, he prefers to stand and fight, and the hunters took great pains to avoid the bulls that turned to defend the herd. Skirting the lone defenders, each Indian picked himself an animal and darted after it. The whole herd was moving now, picking up speed and creating more noise. Dust churned from under their hooves and hid the horsemen racing in.

As each hunter drew abreast of his chosen prey, he would drop the guide rope of his pony, needing both hands to make his kill. This is where the training of the buffalo-ponies showed up, for these rugged little horses, entering into the spirit of the chase, would gallop at top speed as close to the buffalo as they dared, allowing their riders to

deal the death stroke. Ted watched fascinated as first one and then another and finally many of the fatter animals were outrun, cut away from the main herd and dropped with a single shot from a brave's long rifle or bow. For every one that fell to a bullet, at least two more were killed by powerfully driven arrows and spears. How these natives, clinging to their mounts with legs only, could drive the wooden shafts feather-deep in the buffalo's heaving shoulders was beyond Ted. But before he could watch any more his Indian friend speeded up and Ted raced beside him. His own long rifle was fully loaded and carefully primed, and at the bidding of White Calf they rode to one side of the herd where several cows were beginning to slow down. Picking one that seemed safe enough to ride after—if any were safe—he kicked his horse in the flanks ever so gently, signalling to the animal that he was ready.

The little pony laid back his ears and settled into a gait that Ted could hardly believe possible. So smooth was the action as they drew alongside his target, and so easily did the horse move in shoulder-to-shoulder with the great beast, that all Ted had to do was point the weapon and fire. He chose a spot just behind the foreleg, as he had been told, and when the limb shot forward for another pounding step, he fired. The sound of the shot was lost in the noise of hooves, but Ted felt a keen thrill of disappointment when the foreleg of the buffalo, driving backwards, caught the muzzle of the long rifle and nearly tore it from his hands. The shot went under the beast's belly and completely missed.

Ted pulled in his pony and steered it to the outside, where he loaded as fast as he knew how. Once again in the press of the herd, he picked out another animal and let his

horse do the rest. This time he held his mount a little farther away, so the rifle would not touch; but somehow, in his excitement, he missed this shot also.

By this time the herd was starting to turn, and when he had again loaded, Ted found himself thundering along beside a young bull. Giving his pony complete freedom, the boy raised his rifle to take a good aim, and squeezed off the shot as carefully as he could. The animal did not go down. It kept pace beside him for ten yards, while he fought to keep back the tears of disappointment, but just as he was about to head out of the stampede, the buffalo disappeared from his sight. It had died on its feet, dropping from a dead run to a dead heap in the dust.

Out of the corner of his eye he saw White Calf waving and riding wildly toward him through the surging animals. And then the press was over. The tail end of the herd passed, leaving the two lads looking down on Ted's kill. He knew he should have felt happy, but somehow he was too tired. They sat their horses and watched the slaughter. That was what it had become. The Indians had managed to turn the herd back on itself and now the whole mass was going around and around in circles, trying to get away from the hunters who dashed after. All the Indians had to do now was ride around the outside of the circle, pick a target, and shoot. The animals dropped by the dozen all over the plain. Through dust and noise the hunters worked steadily, firing and reloading and firing again without even pausing to make sure of their kills. Ted reloaded again but by the time he had finished the leaders of the herd had broken through the circle and were taking the survivors in a bellowing charge across the prairie. A few young Indians followed and Ted marvelled at the way they made their kills and

rode on to the next without even slowing down. They poured powder, rammed home bullets, placed caps and cocked hammers as easily from the heaving backs of their mounts as though they were standing on firm ground. This, Ted decided, was something to practise. He turned his attention to the Indians who were starting to cut up the dead buffaloes.

It was a gory mess, the job of butchering, but the squaws and the few men who helped them made short work of it. In all, when the slaughter was over, nearly a hundred animals had fallen to the hunters; and for the rest of the day they skinned and packed robes, and only the choicest parts of the carcasses were taken for food. The tongues, humps, and a few fat haunches were wrapped in skins and packed on the creaking travois and the party set out directly for Spitzee. The hunt had been better than expected, and this was only the vanguard of the migration. What they had already taken would serve for the ceremony of the Sun Dance Feast. The big hunt would begin in a few days, when the main body of the herds moved northward.

At sunset Ted broke from the line of Indians and rode down into the woods at Spitzee, heading for the cabin. Across the back of his pony was lashed part of his buffalo, the tongue and the tender hump rolled in the soggy green hide. That morning he had changed into his trousers and a shirt, for he felt that his father would rather see him in white men's clothes than a breechclout. The boy's heart was high and he was bursting to tell his father and Corneau about the hunt. On the next day he was expected to go back to the village to see the Sun Dance. Because he was an adopted member of the tribes, the head chiefs had

allowed him to take part in the ceremony. He rode into the clearing and waved as his father came to the door.

"Well, Son," MacDonnell asked as the lad jumped to the ground, "did you shoot a buffalo?"

"Oh yes, Father," Ted cried, knowing the man did not believe him.

"Did you now?" the elder MacDonnell replied good-humouredly, eyes twinkling. "And did you hire some of the boys to tote it home?"

"No father, it was far too big," said Ted. "Hullo, René, I'm home!"

"Ted hasshot us a buffalo, he says," laughed James, "but he won't bring it home for us to see. We should have seen the one that got away."

"By gar, little sparrow, dat's pretty beeg pack yo' got on de pony dere. W'at yo' got een heem, eh?" The woodsman began to untie the bundle and Ted said nothing until it was on the ground and opened.

"Great Scott!" exclaimed the father, "he did get one! Ted! Good lad."

He slapped his son on the back and Cortneau grinned proudly at him. They dined well on roast buffalo hump that night, while Ted told them of his adventures on the prairie.

"White Calf's father says that this was only the first bunch of buffalo. He said that there'll be lots more in a few days."

"I suppose you'll be wanting to go after them too?" laughed James, delighted that his son was growing into a real pioneer. "Next you'll be wanting to trade back René's gun."

"Oh no, no I won't, Father. But I can see now why they

make the new ones with shorter barrels. With one like that you could ride right up to a bull and put the muzzle right against him and never miss."

"Well, cheer up, laddie. If you've got to go to this feast tomorrow you'd better get some sleep." And on this advice Ted took to his bunk. The trail had been long and hard and he was still a youngster. He slept as soon as he touched his bed, and it was late the next morning when his father called.

"Time to be getting on up to the camp, young fellow," smiled James, ruffling his son's hair. "They're getting ready to cut the pole."

This pole was a main part of the ceremony, and as soon as he had eaten Ted went off to join the cutters. Deep in the woods, in a natural clearing, the Indians had erected a huge lodge of willow and poplar boughs, and in the very centre of this shelter was the place for the pole.

Even the cutting of the pole was a ritual. Ted watched beside White Calf as the hunters and braves of the tribes crept in a circle toward the chosen tree. It was a solitary silver birch, about forty feet high and as straight as a ramrod. With a howl two Indians pounced upon it, swinging their belt axes, and as they chopped wildly at it, the others stood around singing and shouting loudly. In a few moments the tree swayed and then fell crashing, but before it had even touched the ground the Indians were upon it, hacking the branches, cleaning it right down to the bare trunk. While they chopped they uttered loud whoops and screams as though they were attacking some hostile war party. As soon as the pole was clean it was picked up and carried swiftly into the lodge, where it was planted in the hole already dug for it.

Now the ceremony began. It seemed to Ted that all the Indians in the country had gathered here in this little valley. Certainly all the Stonies from Spitzee Anota anyway, and they numbered nearly a thousand. As the whole camp gathered around, dozens of half-naked men jumped into the centre of a huge circle and began to bob up and down in that queer way Indians dance. They were joined by hundreds of others in the course of the day, leaping and stamping in their own happy way until they fell exhausted and their places were taken by others. This was the celebration of great joy and happiness, and each man danced to tell the others of his own personal might as a hunter or warrior. While a band of seven skin drums throbbed dully over the din, squaws sat around the outside of the circle and clapped their hands in rhythm, moaning and chanting in that same way Ted had heard before.

This dancing lasted all the rest of the day, and the natives did not even take time out to eat. When the sun sank behind the mountains they were still at it, and Ted fell asleep to the muffled thump of drums and the weird cries of the dancers.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

The Sun Dance lasted three days in all. After a day and night of joyous dancing, the natives slept late the next morning and it was not until midday that they again took up the celebrations. This second day was a period of mysticism for most of the Indians. It was the job of the medicine men to show off their powers and magical practices. Ted watched for a while, but the superstitious savages were awed by even the simplest tricks, and the white boy soon tired of the show. He left his borrowed pony at the village corral and went on foot to the river. It was only then that he remembered there were other white men at Spitzee, and on this thought he turned upstream, making his way along the banks of the river.

As he neared the island where the Medicine Trees were located, the sound of axes filtered through to him. From his hiding-place across the stream he could see the walls of a large post going up. The American traders had been very daring. They had built their post almost beside the Trees, right on the trail to the north bank. Ted gasped at the impudence, wondering what would happen when the head chieftains found out, if they had not already done so. The great activity of late, the hunt and now the Sun Dance, had no doubt kept them away from the Trees, but any day now worshippers were sure to come along.

Ted watched for a little while, as the men dragged up large cottonwood logs, setting them upright into a ditch,

to make a sort of palisade, although the whole thing appeared to be one building. He was surprised to see how large the fort was, and how far progressed it was in such a short time. Of course there were six of them working, and they had plenty of horses for labour, but still it was fast work. The very strength of the structure made Ted a little suspicious as to the nature of these traders, for he had seen nothing so strong as this fort since leaving Edmonton. A post as well built as this could only be for defence against a strong enemy. Ted crawled away without being seen, and returned to the cabin to tell James and Cortean about the newcomers.

"Whiskey traders!" snarled Cortean savagely.

"Yes, and I'm afraid they mean trouble." MacDonnell shook his head. "These natives have never had much whiskey, and there's no telling what'll happen when they get it. Maybe we'd be wise to get out as soon as we can."

"But Father, these Indians are our friends now. They wouldn't hurt us even if they did get wild. We've never done them any harm," Ted cried.

"When a redskin, he's get de whiskey, he's not Injun no more. He's *devil!* Dat's for true!" exclaimed Cortean. "You t'cenk we can stay for leetle while, Jeem? Until de buffalo hunt she's finish? Too bad to go away now, w'en de hunt don' even start yet, eh?"

"I guess we can stick it out for a while, Renf. At least until trouble starts. Well, we'll have to wait and see, but I'm keeping my gun loaded. You'd better check your own, boys; no use getting caught."

And they took this advice, making sure all arms were properly loaded and ammunition close to hand. But the caution was unnecessary, at least for the present, for the

next day was the most important part of the Sun Dance. It was the feast. James and René were also invited to attend, as well as Ted, and they sat down to a merry company of some two hundred Indians in this particular camp. Other feasts were in progress at other places throughout the valley. With proper ceremony the pipe was passed from man to man around the circle, and even Ted was granted a puff to the four winds. Then the food came. Great piles of smoking buffalo haunch and hump. Kettles of some kind of greens, mixed with berries and small game, were the first to be served. As the pots were passed around the circle, each guest reached in, picked out the morsel he desired, and began eating it. After the meat and stew, there came slices of boiled buffalo tongue, followed by some kind of small animal boiled whole and torn apart as it was passed. There seemed to be a great quantity of these animals to be eaten, and Ted took his share with good appetite.

"Rabbit!" said he to himself, finishing off a large leg, thinking of the big white rabbits of the prairies, the "jacks" as they were called. The meat was quite greasy and fat, but rather good, so he ate what he had taken and thought no more about it. The meal lasted several hours, and it was late afternoon before the three whites rose to go. Most of the Indians were still eating long after Ted was full, and the squaws had just started in on what was left of the feast, determined that nothing should be wasted.

White Calf walked with them to the edge of the hill, and when the two men went down alone, Ted stayed to talk. They spoke of many things that had happened during the past few days, and the two friends became very serious when they discussed the traders upstream. Ted told what he had seen, and White Calf promised to tell his father

that night. Whiskey was a very bad thing, he said, and his people did not want it. But some of the younger braves would drink it and become filled with evil spirits, and when they were like that they would fight and kill and sometimes die themselves. This was a bad thing that had come to Spitzee Anota.

"My father says we may have to go somewhere else if that happens," said Ted. "We have our guns loaded all the time. Maybe we should have a dog to warn us of an attack."

"A dog is a good friend in the night," nodded the Indian boy. "We used to have many."

"Could you give me one?" asked Ted, looking back at the camp for sight of such an animal.

"That cannot be," replied White Calf. "Until today we had enough for everyone. Now we have only a few left, which we must have for ourselves."

"What happened to all the others?" Ted wanted to know. "There used to be dogs all over the place. Where are they now?"

The Indian boy smiled gravely and patted his stomach, then Ted's. "They are in there," he replied. "You helped us to eat them today." Ted's stomach almost turned inside out at this thought. He gulped.

"I thought they were rather big for rabbits," he admitted. "Why did we have to eat them when there was so much else to eat?"

"That is one of the most important parts of our feast," said White Calf. "Without the flesh of dogs we could not have our Sun Dance."

Ted found that the meal of dog did not seem to bother him too much, and in a short while it was forgotten. When he went to the site of the Sun Dance Lodge next day, the

forest was very quiet again, and it was here he found the old Indian. The man, naked, lay, or partly sat, by the wall of the lodge. When Ted approached to see what the matter was, the fellow opened his eyes and stared at the boy blearily. Ted was astounded to find that the Indian was drunk. Then the truth sank in. Here was the first victim of the new traders. Evidently there was nothing the boy could do. He turned away and went back to the post, reporting the incident to James.

That the Indians had found the new fort to their liking was evident from that moment on. Although angry that it had been built on holy ground, they soon came to want the fiery whiskey, and MacDonnell found his trade dropping off sharply. The first of the latest crop of robes, which had been taken in the ceremonial hunt, was beginning to trickle in, and only a small part of the sum were being sold here. The younger Indians were taking their robes upstream to the whiskey post.

"René," MacDonnell said a few days after the trouble started, "it looks pretty bad for our business. Had a couple of men here today wanting whiskey from us. They took their robes upstream to the whiskey post."

"By gar, dat's planty bad, Jeern," the old woodsmen replied, busy at rolling new cartridges for his rifle. "I'm t'eenk de trouble, she's come pretty quick." He got up and looked nervously out of the new loopholes they had cut through the log walls. It was quite dark, the moon hiding behind black clouds.

Suddenly the hair on Ted's neck stood on end as a terrifying scream cut through the silence. The three in the cabin stood still for a fraction of a second, and the scream was broken off by a volley of shots which in turn was followed

by such a racket of whooping and howling that James reached over and snuffed out the lamp, even though the sounds came from some distance away. The disturbance lasted only a few minutes, then faded away, and the woods were still again. They got little sleep that night, either James or René staying awake by turn all night long. With the coming of daylight, Ted ventured outside to see if he could spot his friend, White Calf.

As he had expected, the Indian boy came running into the clearing within a few minutes. Ted asked him eagerly for news about the fight.

"Some of my people were angry at the white men," he told Ted. "They could not get enough whiskey for their robes, so they attacked the fort after dark. The white men were ready for them. Three of my people were killed. Our chiefs are very angry at the white men. Some of the young men want to form a war party and drive them from the country. They are angry at all white people. You must be very careful, my brother. I must go back now." And before Ted could say anything, the lad had slipped into the under-brush and was gone.

That afternoon three of the new traders rode into the clearing. In the lead was the man Ford, whom Ted recognized by the cavalry trousers. With him were Barnes and Jukes. They wasted no time in telling James of their mission.

"We had a bit of trouble last night," announced Ford. "Bunch of hostile Indians tried to run us out. Got two or three, though. Beat 'em proper. What we came for is to tell you to lay off trading guns and powder to 'em. Taggart says if you sellers want to join up with us on the whiskey deal, okay, but you got to stop givin' 'em weapons."

James looked up at the man for a moment. Then he gave his reply: "These Indians are my friends. We have been taken into their families, and we shall continue to trade whatever we feel they need. And they need rifles and ammunition, not only for their own defence, but for buffalo hunting. The more guns they have, the more hides they get. And I'll not take orders from a renegade. Go back to your boss and tell him that!"

Corteau had stepped to James' side as he spoke, and now Ted lifted the muzzle of his old gun. The three mounted men saw they were at a disadvantage, and not wishing to try the marksmanship of any one of these men, turned their horses and loped off upstream.

"Well, lads," breathed MacDonnell sadly, "looks like it's started."

Now the full effect of these whiskey traders fell upon the valley. While there were many older and cooler heads to counsel them, the young bucks of the village were hot to sell everything they owned for a pan of the acid liquor. In their efforts to make their supply last as long as possible, the traders poured a gallon of raw alcohol into a tub and mixed in several gallons of water, along with anything else that might add to its taste, including gunpowder and plugs of tobacco. This deadly liquid was then doled out by cups for everything the Indians offered that might be of value. Overnight many of the richest Indians lost their entire possessions—horses, furs, clothing, everything; and many of the older men, unable to walk after drinking the poisonous brew, staggered to the shelter of the woods and died in a drunken stupor, not knowing why or where.

Within days of the beginning, the trouble reached its peak. Every night there was a raid upon the fort as howl-

ing, maddened warriors tried to break into the stronghold and get at the whiskey that had enslaved them. The wiser heads of the tribes decided to organize this violence into one great raid, and so it came about that two weeks after whiskey came to Spitzee, the entire force of Indians charged down the banks of the old river and assaulted the upper post.

The three men in the lower post heard it. When nearly a thousand maddened Indians go berserk and take to the warpath, the whole country hears about it. In the darkness of their cabin the three stood by peepholes, weapons ready, waiting in the darkness for any attempt on their own lives. They did not have to wait long. A small party of young men, thirsting for blood and not caring whose, had struck off from the main army and raided this small shack with its three poorly armed defenders. The first inkling of attack came when Ted caught sight of the movement by the creek. As he called to the others, there came a shot from the trees, and in an instant the cabin was surrounded by yelling Indians.

The three inside the cabin fired coolly and accurately, hoping to wound rather than kill these savages, but in the darkness it was difficult to know where their bullets were going. Cortéau was firing rapidly, handling his new gun with ease and skill, and Ted loaded as he had never had need to load before. His gun went off almost as fast as his father's breech-loader.

The attack did not seem to slow until suddenly it was all over. James looked at his supply of shells and they realized that most of their ammunition was gone.

"We'll have to try to get more powder and shells from the Americans," he announced soberly. "If this keeps up for

long we'll run out in a day. One of us will have to try to get to the fort."

"Let me go, Father!" begged Ted. "I know the trail and I can keep out of sight better than you two, I bet. Besides, most of the Indians know me and won't hurt me when they're not drunk."

"De boy, he's right, Jeem," agreed Corteau. "He's de smalle' an' can get there easie'. Better he go dan us, eh?"

"I suppose so," said MacDonnell slowly. "But Ted, remember this, don't take any chances, you hear? Better we get out of this place with our skins whole than be driven out with one of us dead. If anything happened to you, I'd stay here till they burned me out."

"I'll be careful, Father. I'll take one of the horses and go. It's not very far, and I'll be back in an hour or so. What'll I take to trade for the ammunition?"

"Better take some of the trade goods, the tobacco and such. See if you can get me some shells for this rifle, will you?" He held out his Whitney, a forty-four rim-fire weapon.

The valley was still and quiet now in the starlight. Ted trotted through the underbrush beside the river. He watched carefully on all sides, and soon reached the island without any sign of danger. The sound of his horse splashing across the shallow river brought a command from the fort.

"Stop where you are!" it ordered. Ted stopped on the shore. He sat his pony, waiting until someone told him what to do.

"What d'ya want?" came the harsh question from a loophole.

"We need ammunition bad," called Ted. "The Indians

raided us last night too. We need powder and shot, I'll buy it from you." There was the sound of whispering from inside the post, then:

"All right, sonny, ride on up, but don't try no tricks. If you got any o' your Injun friends waitin' to jump us, just remember you'll be the fust one to get it, see?"

"No tricks!" promised Ted, riding up to the big gate. It swung open a little way, and he rode through. The enclosure was cramped, for all along the walls of the small post were tiny rooms, evidently each for a single purpose—one for quarters for the men, one for stock, one for trade goods, and one for storage of the furs. Ted jumped down as soon as he got inside.

"So, you fellers needs some help after all?" sneered the leader, Taggert. "Say you need ammunition, eh? Powder and ball, eh?" He threw back his head and laughed loudly. "Wal, ain't that just too bad? Found out them redskins ain't as friendly as you thought, did you?"

"They are friendly when they're not drunk!" flared Ted angrily.

"Now, now, youngster, no need to get riled up. Injuns is bad all the way through. Only good Injuns is dead ones."

"That isn't so!" cried the boy. "I know all kinds of Indians, and they're the finest people in the world."

"Then how come they're raidin' you these nights, eh boy?" Taggert grinned through his dirty beard.

"It's because you fellows have made them drunk all the time, that's why," Ted retorted. "They were happy and healthy until you men came to Spatzee. Now you're killing them all just for a few pelts. I wish the law was out here. Then you couldn't do it."

"Wal now, there ain't no law here at all, is there?"

'Ceptin' what we make ourselves. You got a pretty loud tongue for a younker, you have. Mind you keep it under control or you may be sorry."

"I didn't come here to be threatened by you, you murderer. I only came to ask for fair trade. If that's your answer, I'll ride back to our post and we'll hold out by ourselves, without your help." Ted leaped on his pony, wheeled it toward the gate and started forward.

"Hold on, kid. You ain't goin' nowheres!" With a great leap, Taggert had the horse by its hackamore, and in another instant Ted was dragged from its back by a heavy hand. He fell heavily in the dirt of the compound. As he sat up, dizzy and breathless, another trader came up.

"Here now, Lafe. No call to treat the boy rough. He's in this same as we are." It was the man Allard. He reached down to help the boy to his feet, and then continued in a maled voice:

"All right, son, climb on. And you skedaddle back to your post just as fast as that pony will go, you hear?" Ted nodded silently.

"No ya don't!" cried Taggert, clutching the rope again. "This kid come here on his own invite. If his old man hadn't of give them hostiles guns and powder, we wouldn't have no trouble now. The kid can go, but I think we'll be needin' the horse." The two men stared at each other for several moments before Allard's eyes fell. He nodded.

"All right, then, but give him his rifle and belt. At least he'll have a fightin' chance to get back to his folks."

Ted's gun and hunting belt were thrust at him and he found himself pushed roughly through the gateway. A second later the huge gate thudded shut behind him, and he stood alone in the clearing.

With a little leap he darted toward the brush nearest him. Once under cover he hugged the ground for some time, waiting to make sure his way was clear. Moving like a shadow through the bushes Ted managed to work his way to the river bank, and when everything looked safe, he dashed across and threw himself again into shelter. Then began the long job of sneaking home. But it was to be longer than he expected.

From the direction of the post came a jarring rattle of gunfire, and as he listened with a sinking heart, the firing died away, leaving the woods silent once again. Throwing caution to the wind he leaped to his feet and dashed along the trail toward the post. Half an hour later, out of breath and very frightened, he threw himself into cover at the edge of the clearing. As he fought to recover his breath, the sharp odour of burning wood drifted to him. Crawling forward to the edge of the bush, he looked out toward the cabin.

The whole post was in flames. The heat of the burning building was withering trees and grass all around him. As he watched, the roof fell in under its weight of sod, sending a shower of sparks flying skyward. Without daring to move he watched, almost hypnotized by the fire. Slowly he began to realize that this was his home. And the thought brought him awake. What of his father and René? Where were they? Were they safe? In an agony of fear he hurled himself across the clearing as close to the fire as the heat would allow. All around were the signs of battle—broken arrows, shining brass cartridge cases, churned earth, and flattened grass. Ted stood still in the flickering light, and the world seemed empty now. No sign of bodies was to be seen in or about the ruined cabin, and Ted again took cover in the

brush. It was too late to do anything here. He had to save himself now. He headed back to the upper post on the island.

This time he called loudly to the fort before he approached, and as the boy ran up to the gate, it swung open for him. Once inside all his strength seemed to leave him, and he leaned miserably against the logs as he told his story to Allard. Several of the other men stood around listening, and as he finished, they picked up their weapons, checked them, and took up stations all around the post. Ted was taken into one of the rooms, evidently the living-part of the fort, and he promptly sat down on a bed, buried his head in his arms, and wept.

Barnes and Allard had entered the room with him, and each of the men went to a loophole in the wall. They did not have long to wait. The attack was announced only by a long whoop, and before they knew it, the entire force of Indians was upon them. From all sides they came, riding in close, whooping and screaming, firing wildly, riding away out of sight again. The white men stood by their loopholes, firing at any and every moving thing, loading and reloading as fast as their hot weapons would allow. For perhaps ten minutes the skirmish continued with fury. Ted crouched uncaring in his corner, the defenders standing in their rooms, firing steadily. Then it was over.

The suddenness of the Indians' departure struck them like a breath of fresh air. As the choking smoke rolled up and drifted away they became aware of an intense quietness in the fort. The men waited, silent and unmoving, watching for some trick. The acrid clouds of burnt powder whirled and eddied through the starlit gloom of the clearing. Of the six men in the post, three remained standing by

the slits. Jukes in the storeroom was trying to tie a dirty neckcloth around a shattered arm. In the stable Taggart mopped at blood streaming from a gash in his scalp. And back in the living-quarters, Ted opened his eyes to see Barnes leaning against the wall, peering outside. In the corner, sprawled motionless over a bunk, lay Allard, still clutching the Maynard which stuck out through the peephole. The back of his head was gone.

"We beat 'em!" came a hoarse whisper from Barnes. "We beat the red devils! We whupped 'em proper that time!" He broke into a sort of cackling laugh that made Ted shudder. The lad tried to take his horrified gaze from the dead man. He knew that he was entirely friendless now. Next to his father and René, and some of the Indians, this man Allard had been the only one to show him kindness. Now they were all gone. His mind, dulled by the recent happenings, began to turn over his chances, and even as he pondered the problem, there came a light thud on the roof above. Silence followed, but a yellow shadow flickered on the trees and through the peepholes.

"Fire arrow!" exclaimed Barnes. "Won't do no harm on the sod." As he spoke there came several more thuds, and the clearing became red with the glow of burning pitch. The defenders waited in silence, taking the opportunity to gather more ammunition close to them. The flames from the arrows burned out and all was still and dark again. Suddenly there sounded a heavier thud on the sods above, and the pole rafters shook to the weight of a man walking overhead. No doubt the idea was to tear off some of the protecting sods so as to drop a torch inside.

"Time to light the candles!" cried Barnes loudly, so that the others could hear. The footsteps on the roof stopped

almost over Ted's head, and as they did so Barnes raised the muzzle of his rifle to that spot and fired. He fired directly through the roof, hoping that the bullet would penetrate, and it seemed to do the trick. The rafters bounced violently as some heavy object fell, and there was no further movement on the roof at that point. Immediately after Barnes fired, there came the heavy reports from several other rooms in the fort. Evidently the Indians had tried more than one place at once. But the 'lighting of the candles' had dampened their spirits for the time being, for during the next half-hour nothing further happened. By this time Ted had made up his mind. While Barnes peered steadily through his slit, the boy took up his long gun and slipped through the door into the compound.

No one was near him as he made for the big gate, but over in the open stable he could see the figure of Taggert leaning against the wall. As quietly as possible, Ted lifted the bar and swung the gate open enough to slide through. He had not been seen by the traders. They were far too busy to notice him. For several minutes he stood with his back to the log palisade, watching the darkness around, listening for any sound of danger. To the west there was a deeper shadow cast by the moon on the fort, and he slipped quietly around to this shade. On hands and knees he slithered quickly across the clearing and into the kind darkness of the trees. He kept on crawling cautiously until he was about fifty yards in the thickest part of the brush, and not until then did he stop. He curled himself up among the trunks of some great bushy willows and lay still.

For fully an hour he lay there, unmoving. His breath was normal again, and his heart had stopped pounding. Now he lay listening. Perhaps that was why he suddenly realized

what was happening. The woods were full of moving, crawling, creeping Indians, closing in on the fort. Ted held his breath as the silent forms crept past his hiding-place. Not one or two, but dozens! And it must be like that all around the clearing. He drew his long gun close under him, trying to keep it out of sight.

When the stalking savages no longer moved past him, he listened intently for the attack to begin. It took another hour. And yet, it was not much of an attack. A hundred Indians, creeping close under the walls in the deep shadow which he himself had used, pushed flaming brands through the loopholes and threw them over the top of the wall and gate. The gate had been barred again since Ted made his escape; but two score screaming warriors heaving against it soon forced entry. As the first bright flames leaped up from the fort, Ted crept warily from his shelter, heading for the river.

He put from his mind the fate of the whites, but at the sound of horses hard ridden thundering across the valley, he hoped they had all made good their escape. He had no further time to think of them. His first job was to get across the river and get out of Spitzee Anota. The long rifle dragged and bumped noisily as he crawled, but he was not willing to leave it behind. In a land of wilderness, all alone, a boy needed a strong friend like that.

While the Indians howled and screeched around the fort, Ted crossed the river to the north bank and holed up in the brush once again. The savages would not be looking for him. They did not know he had been in the fort. For the time being, he was safe.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

TAKO's stock knocked the fat grouse off her perch without even ruffling a feather. With his long rifle in one hand and the bird in the other, he made his way carefully along the bank to a large clump of willows close by the water. For a moment he squatted staring at the grouse, wondering about the best way to eat it. Fire was his first thought. But he had no flint or steel! Still thinking about it, he began to gather small sticks and dry grass for tinder. He remembered White Calf telling him how the Indians often started fire by rubbing two sticks together, and he selected a couple of dry pieces. He rubbed and he rubbed and he rubbed, but the only thing that got hot was himself.

He sat against the big willow and thought some more. He was getting mighty hungry now. He wondered if he could ever bring himself to eat the bird raw. The natives sometimes did, but the thought made him sick.

His gaze moved from the bird to his old rifle lying beside it. He looked at the stock, the long barrel, and his eyes stopped at the lock with its great hammer and shiny copper cap. The cap could light powder. Powder would burn.

With a little happy cry he bounded to his feet. There was just a chance! It might work! He knelt beside the weapon, thinking swiftly of the things that would have to be done. First he removed the cap from the nipple, placing it carefully back in the box with the others. Quickly he drew the ramrod from its tube under the barrel. One end of this rod

had a brass tip which unscrewed to bare a sharp screw point, called a "worm." This worm end Ted then rammed down the muzzle until it hit the lead ball. When he felt the lead, the boy pressed hard on the rod, turning the screw slowly into the soft metal. As soon as Ted figured the worm had bitten deep enough into the ball to hold it firmly, he put all his strength into drawing the ramrod, with the ball securely hooked to the screw, out of the barrel. Even though the recovered ball was scarred and battered from the extraction, Ted popped it back into his pouch for future use. With a small bit of wood he then made a rough plug for the muzzle, to keep the powder from getting damp or falling out.

This part of the job was done, and he set to work to gather a quantity of dry grass. When he had several handfuls, the lad crushed it into a tight ball and placed it in a spot in the centre of the tiny glen where he was hiding, piling a few twigs on top. The next step was the important one, and just to be sure, he removed the plug from his rifle and added another charge of powder. Laying the weapon on the ground with its muzzle resting just in front of the ball of grass, he placed a cap on the nipple and gave the hammer full cock. Then he took up a position behind and to the side of the gun. Making a silent prayer that the flash would light his grass ball before it blew away, he pulled the trigger.

Almost instantly a cloud of powder smoke rose through the willows, shutting out sight of everything. A hissing roar filled the glen and echoed strangely from the banks. As the yellow pall rose above the bushes, Ted raised his head, hardly daring to look. His heart leaped. His trick had

worked perfectly, and burning grass lay scattered in a line through the brush. He had a few minutes of feverish activity, stamping out the beginnings of a forest fire.

The fire under control, he carefully fed it until it developed into the small, hot flame he wanted. He took great care to make sure his fuel was only the driest willow, for dry willow makes a good hot fire, and gives off very little smoke to be seen by passing hostile eyes. Several large rocks from the river served to make a fireplace, and then Ted turned his attention to the grouse.

A couple of minutes was all it took to open and clean the bird, and quickly Ted plastered the entire carcass with wet mud. He then carried it gently back to the fire and laid it right in the middle of the flames. With a few larger pieces of wood, he built the fire up around his meal, and when he was sure it would keep going for a while, lay down to get a few minutes of sleep. First, however, he carefully cleaned and reloaded his rifle. Then, and only then, did he crawl under a fallen tree and curl up for his nap.

Ted woke with a start. It was very hot and very still now, and only the gurgle of the river beside him broke the silence. A glance at his fire reminded him of his meal, and he jumped up to see how it was doing. As he leaned over the fire, a warm, delicious smell tickled his nose, and immediately he realized how hungry he was. Raking the ashes from the lump of mud, he lifted it out with two long sticks. The mud was dry and hard, and had cracked open in several places, releasing the wonderful odour of well-cooked meat. With one blow of a stick Ted broke open the shell of clay, and as the pieces fell away they took with them every bit of feathers and skin, leaving the fowl steaming, cooked so thoroughly that the boy picked it apart with

his fingers, the flesh hardly sticking to the bones long enough to be picked up.

There was not much left of the grouse when Ted tossed the last bone into the brush. By this time the day was well advanced and the Indians would be moving again, returning to their tepees downstream after the night's activities. Now, with stomach full and time for thinking, Ted gave thought to his situation, and to the men he had left back on the island. Since his father was gone, and Corteau, the valley held no safety for him. With the natives on the war-path against all whites, he would not stand much of a chance out on the prairie alone. Even the Indians who were his friends could not help him now. Even White Calf must be an enemy for the time being.

For a long time no white man would be safe in Spitzee Anota. There was not much use trying to reach the Benton Trail in hopes of meeting traders. There would be none for a while. His best course, he decided, was to stay with the river, and if he could manage to get away from the hunting grounds while the buffalo were passing, perhaps he could find some kind of shelter or cabin to hide out in until help arrived. With this thought on his mind he fell asleep again, and it was dark when he awoke.

The days that followed were much the same. By patiently waiting and watching he managed to catch a rabbit or grouse, clubbing it with a stick and cooking it as he had done the first time. Fish he pounced upon in the shallows of the river were opened up flat and broiled over the coals. A few late berries helped fill his stomach when nothing else was available.

Before starting his trek upriver the lad made himself a fire-box, after the fashion of the Indians. This consisted of

a small box or cage of loosely woven green willows, with a strip of bark to carry it. Inside this cage rested a large piece of punk, smouldering and glowing as it swung from Ted's hip. Each day, and sometimes several times a day, a new piece of punk was added. From each fire Ted saved one such stick, and was thus able to build a fire any time he pleased without having to use the rifle again.

Sleeping at the daytime and travelling during the lighter hours of the night, he made his way slowly along the twisting river, keeping well down in the bottoms as much as possible. In places where the river carved its way through cutbanks and steep rock walls, he was forced to make his way along the edge of the bank, but he took great care on these occasions, making certain that the way was clear.

A few days of this sort of travel, stumbling over miles of gravel, wading waist-deep in the cold stream, slogging his way across sandbars and mud flats, carried Ted many miles from the valley of Spitzer. At times, when he climbed the high banks and looked westward, he caught sight of the peaks, still distant, still drawing him on, and then he realized where he was bound. The mountains were calling him. He would go to them and stay until danger was past.

Just how he would live once he got into the mountains was of no immediate concern to the boy. All his efforts were required to hike the remaining miles to the foothills. Somewhere along the way he found that his moccasins were worn out, and he finished his journey in bare feet. The weather stayed mild and dry and many days after the raid on the forts he found himself near the great green hills that climbed far above him, to join the grey rock of the mountain. This was the first range, and Ted was amazed to note

that the river, far from ending here, rushed foaming from a cleft between the peaks.

Passing between the heights of this first range, which formed a sort of great gateway to the forest of peaks, Ted came out at last into a broad valley lying between the two ranges, running far to the south in a vast ocean of hills and valleys heavily timbered with evergreen trees of several kinds.

Advancing farther into the valley, he was surprised, and immediately concerned, to come upon a deep-trodden trail leading from the very pass through which he had just entered, and running over hills and valleys, far into the distant south. From the width and beaten depth of this trail it seemed to be much used, and Ted began to remember something White Calf had told him, about great hunting parties of Indians coming up from the south to hunt in these mountains and prairies, then driving their pack trains loaded with meat back to their own territories. This, then, must be their trail, and from the look of it, the last party had passed only a short time before.

For a little while Ted followed the trail, keeping well to the side, afraid that the savages might come past at any moment. But gradually he began to realize that this journey was made only once a year, and if the hunters had already gone back, there was little chance any Indian would venture along now. Besides, winter was not far off, and all the natives would be holing up in villages closer to the prairies. Ted felt much freer after this, and walked along the broad road with no fear. Now he could begin to live openly, and his first thought was of a good place to rest for a few days, some spot where there might be good water, and good hunting.

For this camp he chose a level spot high on the hillside above the trail, so that he could see it for some distance both ways. Any party that happened along could be seen easily from this point. He slept soundly and easily that night, for the first time in many days. His punkwood ember had been used to build a good fire, big enough to see at night, and warm enough to keep him quite comfortable as he snuggled against a slab of rock. If there were wolves or other animals about, the fire would keep them away.

"Well now, what needs doing first?" he asked himself the next morning. He stared at his bare toes for a moment. To be sure, he needed new moccasins, but dressed skins were required for that. As he sat by the fire a sudden shower made up his mind. What he needed most was some kind of shelter.

His first thought was to build a log cabin, but the obvious objection to that was that he had no axe. Better look around for some natural shelter, he decided; and picking up his rifle, he set out to explore the hillside.

At a little rock slide he found what he was looking for. The slide had started when a huge boulder had split, and the whole front of this rock had fallen down the slope a little distance, leaving the rest of it, smooth and straight, sunk about six feet into the side of the hill. Broken rubble was piled up against the base to a height of perhaps ten feet, but the pieces were small and could easily be removed.

Leaning his rifle against a tree, he climbed to the top of the slide and began throwing off the loose stones. It was hard work, but gradually the pile became lower and lower, and at length all the rubble was cleared away and the sheer wall of the boulder stood framed in the hillside like some ancient doorway, the earth jutting out on either side of it.

All the enclosure needed was to be built up in front and roofed over. Ted was pleased to note that the rock faced almost due south, so that the whole hill sheltered it from the north and hid it completely from the trail below. This seemed as good a place as any to spend the winter.

As he roasted a freshly killed grouse for his dinner, Ted planned his hut carefully. If it was to shelter him properly for a whole winter, it would have to be a good job of building. But with half of the walls already up, it shouldn't be too much work. Slowly turning the grouse on its spit, he caught the dripping fat with a piece of bark and poured it over the browning meat, and wonderful vapours drifted out across the hillside. Again Ted picked the bones clean, and as he did so, he remembered having once thought, "Oh to be an Indian!" Well, here he was one! And he started work on his lodge.

With a flat piece of rock, the lad first scraped the ground as level as he could, taking out rocks and filling the holes with dirt. When a fairly smooth floor had been finished, some of the best flat stones from the heap were fitted carefully together to make the front of the hut, leaving space for a doorway. More stones were used to build up the sloping side walls to a level; and finally Ted collected quantities of moss and stuffed up the chunks between the stones. The roof would be made of saplings covered with sod; but that could wait until tomorrow. He was tired out.

The roof was finished next day, and Ted spent the rest of the afternoon in just plain loafing. He congratulated himself on the fact that save for the first day of his escape, he had not needed to fire his rifle once to get food. But as he rested, he suddenly realized that with the coming of winter his luck might not hold. He had to find some way

of killing game without his gun. That must be saved for emergency, if possible. He checked his supply of powder and caps. The bag held only forty balls. He had enough powder for that many shots, but his cap box was nearly empty. There were only two dozen caps left. Somehow he would have to find a way to trap the smaller game, and leave the gun for big game if there was any around. At any rate there seemed to be enough squirrels and grouse to keep him from starving. He leaned his rifle just inside the doorway of the hut, and taking up a short club went for a walk up the hill.

From the first stand of pines that he stalked, he was able to knock over three grouse. After a volley of stones, two squirrels tumbled to his reach. Satisfied with his hunt, he turned downhill towards the hut. The path led across a rock-lined gulley, at the bottom of which tinkled the clearest stream of water Ted had ever seen. From a tiny round pool carved out of the bed of the creek, he got his drinking water each day. As he topped the bank and jumped down into the stream-bed, he ran into the intruder.

It would be hard to say which was the more surprised—the boy, or the deer that stood looking at him. For a moment neither moved, then the deer was gone without appearing to move, vanishing over the rocks and into the forest. The thrill of the hunter passed through Ted. He groped to bring his rifle up, until he realized that he had left it at camp. With an angry stamp of his foot he dashed down to his hut, tossed the small game inside, grabbed up his rifle and ran back up to the waterhole. By the time he got back to where he had seen the deer, it was deep in the woods. He tracked it a short way before he again caught sight of it. The animal was just walking into a grove of spruce trees when he saw

the movement. In a flash the rifle was up and roaring. Ted ran quickly over to the trees to finish it off, but even as he ran he knew it was no use. He had missed! A clear shot and he had missed. A whole charge of powder, a cap, and a ball wasted! Next time he would take more care. He couldn't afford to miss any more.

When he finally got back to his hut he was faced with another problem. He had enough game for several meals, but how could he keep it that long? In winter it would be all right, but in the warm summer the meat would spoil overnight. Then Ted recalled the system at Fort Edmonton. Edmonton was known all across the prairies for its modern ideas, and their meat houses were famous. There they had huge ice-pits, lined with blocks of ice cut from the river each winter. The pits were filled with meat and covered with snow and earth, and the meat in them lasted as long as they wished, even through the hottest weather. There was no ice at this time of the year. But there were patches of snow in the forests and gulleys far up the hill-sides. Ted almost ran to find some.

He found it just inside the forest. Here in the deep woods where the trees grew so close together that sunlight seldom reached the ground, some of the drifts of winter lay all year long. With a basket hastily woven of pine boughs Ted gathered as much as he could and ran down the hill to his camp. In the deep shade of a boulder he dug a pit, filled it with snow, and patted it hard around the edges. Then in this snow, clean and cold, he tucked his kill, already dressed and cleaned. With a layer of snow on top, Ted found a slab of rock that would be heavy enough to keep out coyotes. Thus he saved himself the task of having to hunt every day. One worry less.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

As the days passed, Ted grew more and more used to the routine chores of this new life. His snow-pit was always filled with fat grouse and sometimes rabbits, but it was the common red squirrel that allowed him the first real comfort. There seemed to be millions of these chattering, frisky little fellows, and he soon became quite skillful at knocking them from the trees with well-aimed stones. Not only were they good to eat, but he carefully skinned each one, so that within a short time he had a large pile of the tiny pelts.

Ted knew from experience that to be any good a skin must be properly treated or tanned to make it soft and pliable, and to prevent the hairs from falling out. He also knew that the Indians used a mixture of the animal's brains and liver mashed to a paste and kneaded into the leather, after which the whole skin was chewed for hours, a little bit at a time, by the patient old squaws, to make it soft. While he had no objection to using the mixture, he did not feel like sitting and chewing on the skins, but with a little experimentation he soon discovered that they could be softened quite easily by rubbing them and drawing them back and forth across a post.

One by one, as time allowed, the boy cured his supply of squirrel skins, and when he figured there were enough, he laid them out side by side on the ground. Then came the problem of sewing the small furs together to make a blanket or robe. His greatest need was for some kind of thread. As

he had learned from his Indian friends, he split a freshly killed rabbit down along the backbone and took out the length of tough white sinews that lay there. These he soaked in a little pool for several days, and when they had swelled up, pounded them upon a flat rock until the fibres split apart, and soon he had a fine supply of thin, strong threads. With a couple of lengths of thread in his mouth at all times, for they had to be wet to keep them pliable, Ted began joining the skins together. With the point of his knife he punched very tiny holes around the edges of the pelts, sewing them together as he went, and day by day the robe grew larger and larger.

Spread upon his bed of pine boughs, this blanket was large enough for him to roll up in, and with the cooling nights, without a door to his hut, he began to need it. A second robe was begun as soon as the first was finished, this one shaped to be a sort of cloak or sleeveless coat. Somehow he would have to make himself a pair of moccasins, for the days were beginning to shorten and the mornings nipped his bare toes until the sun was high above.

Each time he went for water he carried his rifle, remembering the spoiled chance at the deer. And it was this memory that gave him his second chance. He had wandered up the creek past his one pool, hoping to find some other watering-place more popular with the wild life of the country. The stream flowed noisily down the hillside in a series of big steps, carved out of the solid rock of the mountain. Ted walked quietly through the bed of the stream, climbed step after step, going higher and higher toward the source. In front of him was a double step, where the water fell first over a four-foot drop, then again over a two-foot drop to the level where Ted stood. Holding his rifle

carefully so as not to knock it on the rock or get it wet, he began to step up to the first ledge. The scrape of hooves on rock above froze him motionless. Then, very slowly and cautiously, he lifted himself up to the lower drop, stooping to hide below the high step. From above this rock, very close, came the sound of something splashing and drinking.

Ted held his breath. He settled the rifle solidly against him and began to raise his head above the level of the rock. The stream poured over the lip of rock right at his ear, but by peering warily around the flow of it, he could just look across the upper pool. He caught his breath. Directly in front of him, head down, stood a huge deer-like animal, its muzzle deep in the cool water, contentedly sucking in great gulps and blowing through its nostrils under the water, making bubbles that floated down to Ted. He had never seen such an animal before, but he knew what it must be—the wapiti that the Indians talked so much of. Once as plentiful on the prairies as the buffalo now were, the animals had been driven back into the mountains and they now flourished almost unknown to white men. These herds of wapiti, or elk, were the prey of the hunting bands of Indians from the south each year. And right in front of Ted was a buck with a spread of antlers on him so heavy the boy wondered how he could carry it.

As the boy stared, unmoving, another animal of the same kind came down a path to the waterhole. At the newcomer's approach, the first elk moved sideways, placing its back to Ted, whereupon the young hunter slid noiselessly down behind his rock. The water trickled over and splashed on his arm, so small was the space where he sat, but very carefully he brought the rifle up, checked the nipple and cap, and gave the hammer full cock with a hand cupped

over it to deaden the click. Then, with everything ready, he raised the barrel of the gun up onto the rock and began to slide it slowly, steadily up and out across the ledge. At the same time he raised himself, peering out from the side of the rock again, one hand under the rifle to keep it from scraping. Even with all his care, some slight sound must have startled the buck, for when Ted again looked at him, he stood wide-legged in the pool, head up, antlers crowning him like the limbs of a great willow.

Both animals stood still now, and Ted stopped breathing. For perhaps two minutes they stayed like that, the elk unmoving, Ted gasping little breaths. Then, evidently assured that no immediate danger threatened, both elk bent down to resume their drinking. Ted breathed evenly again, steadying his hand for the shot. His rifle levelled slowly and the boy bent his head until the smooth stock was warm against his cheek. The little ball on his sight crept into line on the buck's shoulder, and he touched the trigger gently. Then he began to shake as though he had a chill, and instead of one animal in his sights, there appeared to be about a dozen, all going round and round until the boy grew dizzy.

He closed his eyes, still gripping the rifle, fearing to move it the slightest bit. For just the space of a deep breath he stood there, eyes closed, and then the dizzy spell left him. Once again he peeked around the rock, laying his eye to the sights. He was alarmed to see that the elk had drifted away toward the path, and even then they were stepping out of the pool. The buck hesitated a moment as his mate gained the solid ground, and in that instant Ted lunged up on his neck, stopped breathing, and squeezed the trigger.

Startled by the unfamiliar blast echoing in the narrow

confines of the canyon, and thrown off balance as the weapon kicked wildly due to his twisted position, Ted staggered back, stepping heavily down the lower fall, and landing on his back in the water. Even through his fall and fright he had presence of mind enough to hang on to the rifle, and as he lit in the water, it was high and dry above him, at arm's length. Scrambling quickly to his feet, he leaped up the step and over the ledge.

There, just where it had stood, the buck had fallen, with its hind legs trailing in the pool. The doe had disappeared. In the bright light of day the young hunter stood over his kill, filled with a feeling of pride and victory, mixed with a strange half-regret that this noble creature, created to wander and leap through Nature's gardens, should fall victim to his marksmanship. For a brief moment he felt almost sorry, then he brightened at a thought. Here was the leather for his new moccasins, and his new door, and perhaps a pair of trousers. And think of the meat! He would have venison for days to come.

But then another thought struck him. If this was a popular watering-place, the body would frighten away other game. Clearly it would have to be taken away before he could do any work on it. But how could he move it? He was only a fourteen-year-old boy, and this was a great elk, weighing hundreds of pounds. It would have to be cut up and carried away in pieces.

Somehow Ted managed to drag and roll the carcass to one side of the pool, clear of the water and of the trail down to it. Here he set about the big, nasty job of skinning it, and here his experience of the buffalo hunt came in handy again. Whereas smaller game was hung up by the hind legs to be skinned, the Indians merely rolled the buffalo around

on the ground as necessary. For the boy, it was quite a chore, but little by little the skin came off, even though there were a few cuts here and there. Nevertheless it was a hide, and as soon as he had finished, he rolled it up tightly and laid it to one side.

Now began the job of butchering, but it was not much trouble to cut off the parts he wanted, the parts he could use immediately. First he cut out the tongue, thinking all the while of the wonderful treat in store when it was boiled and sliced. Then with great effort he hacked off the haunches, so large that he could hardly carry one at a time. Bit by bit he cut the limbs and stripped the flesh from the elk, not bothering to gut it, as he could not hope to take away the whole carcass. And so, with both haunches, the tongue, and several great slabs of rib and rump meat, he began packing it down to his hut.

Of course, his snow-pit was not nearly large enough, so as soon as the meat and skin were safely stored in the shack and the remains of the carcass cut up and dragged up over the bank, he ran uphill as fast as he could to bring back another load of snow. Only the haunches were packed away. The tongue, scraped and washed, was boiled in a pit in the same manner as Ted had seen the Stoners do it, and the thin back and side flesh, after being cut in strips, was hung across long sticks over the fire to dry and cure, becoming finally the tough, long-lasting food known as "jerky," or jerked meat. It was this jerky, beaten to a powder with stones, that formed the basic part of pemmican. Dried properly, it would last for years without spoiling. When all other rations ran out, Ted could live for weeks on the supply from one animal.

And now, with enough meat to last him for a while, he

turned his attention to the hide. It was still soft and green, and the first job was to scrape any bits of flesh from it, leaving only the bare skin. When he had done this with a piece of bone, he rolled the hide loosely and laid it in a shallow pool of water. For a week it lay there, soaking, for the next step in the making of leather was to remove the hair, and after lying in the water for a week the hair came out readily when he again scraped it. Now the hide was ready for curing. The same method would work as with the squirrel skins, the paste of brains and liver; but to make good weatherproof buckskin, Ted knew well, it was necessary to smoke it. While the clean, scraped hide again soaked in its pool, the lad built his smokehouse. In a little niche in the rocks across the gulley he stood logs on end to form a sort of high, narrow tepee, tall enough for the hide to hang full length. Across this little lodge he propped a long pole, to which the treated skin would be lashed.

When the skin was in the right condition, he hung it in the smokehouse and lit the fire beneath it. The shape of the tepee acted like a chimney, drawing the thick smoke upwards past the hide, so that the leather became filled with the smoke, taking on the pungent smell that is its characteristic.

While the skin hung curing in its shelter, Ted began to wonder what lay beyond the hill he lived on. For the first time since he had come into the valley he felt the desire to explore. Consequently, after he had the smokehouse fire well wetted down so that the green grass and boughs produced a heavy blue smoke, he took up his rifle and set off down the hill towards the trail.

When he reached the hard path, he hesitated for a few minutes, not sure which way he should go. The trail jogged

from the west along the river, just the same way he had come, but it vanished over the hills far to the south, and he decided to follow it for a short way. The grass and earth were dry beneath his feet and all kinds of small animals frisked through the trees and underbrush. He shifted the rifle to the crook of his left arm and sauntered idly up the trail.

He had walked perhaps a mile when the dugout caught his eye. It was built of logs neatly fitted together and all but covered with sods, on both the roof and the sides. Indeed, the boy had to look for several minutes before he could decide where the door was. It had been solidly covered with earth and when this was dug away a wall of rocks barred his way. Now Ted was no thief, but he knew what this little lodge should be. If it was what he thought and hoped it was, it would prove to be a cache of the hunting party. If it was such, he felt no guilt as he dug out the rocks in front of the door. It belonged to the Indians and it was because of them that he was forced to live like this. He felt they owed him something. Behind the rocks was another barrier. This time it was only a small log door, which opened easily when he unlatched it and pushed it open.

Inside the hut it was dark and Ted drew back as the smell of mould and stale air rolled out. After a moment or two he stuck his head in, but his body blocked the light, so the only thing to do was go right in. The doorway was about two feet square, just large enough for a man to crawl through, and Ted slipped in easily. Squatting in the dark, he waited until his eyes became used to the dim light that came in through the little opening, and gradually he began

to see what was around him. All along one wall there was a long shelf, and on this shelf was piled a great deal of stuff. He crawled closer, straining to make out what might be there. In the corner he could see a pile of withered pine boughs, and it was clear that this was some kind of permanent shelter, for someone had slept here. Perhaps the Indians on their trip north would drop off a hunter or two at this shack, then pick them and their game up on the way back again. Ted reached the shelf and the first thing his eyes lit on was the lamp.

It wasn't much of a lamp, just a flat tin full of some kind of grease with a piece of cloth sticking out of one corner for a wick. But what pleased Ted most was the large splinter of flint that lay beside it. This he took in one hand, drawing his knife with the other. With steady hands he struck the flint sharply against the back of the knife, and was rewarded by a fine strong spark that flashed briefly in the darkness. From the bed near by he gathered a handful of dry grass and pine needles, and again the room was brightened momentarily. This time, however, the spark did not die out. It fell square on the heap of tinder, and as soon as the latter started to glow, Ted snatched it up and swung it gently back and forth to fan the ember into full life. In a moment it flared up and blazed merrily, and he applied it to the blackened wick.

The cloth smoked sulkily for a moment before it finally caught, and then the light began pushing the shadows back into the corners, the flame guttering gently in the foul air and waving a smoky pencil across the logs of the ceiling. He placed the lamp on the floor beside him and pulled toward him the first thing within reach. It was a wooden

box, and the slab lid was tied on with rawhide thongs. He worked at the knots until they slipped loose, and when he raised the lid, he sighed happily at the contents. There must have been at least fifty pounds of fine white flour in the box. What a feast he could have with that! True, it would not go very far by itself, but if he used it sparingly it would certainly freshen up his meals.

Again he reached for something on the shelf, and this time it turned out to be a greasy bag full of pemmican, hard and dry, but still edible. The next bag he took from the shelf was smaller and much cleaner. It contained about ten pounds of salt. Strangely enough, salt was just about the most precious thing to be had out here in the wilderness. Even back at the fort at Edmonton, salt had been scarce, and at Spitzee they had often used gunpowder instead, since it contained a kind of salt. But since Ted had been in the mountains he had not tasted seasoned meat, not wanting to use his scant supply of powder for such a thing. Now he felt richer than ever before in his life. How strange, he thought, that such things as common flour and plain salt could make such a difference to a man's life.

And the food was only part of this cache. Under the shelf, in the farther corner, he discovered a whole keg of powder, unopened, and beside it, in a tin box, were scores of caps. A bag of well-cast lead balls completed his discovery, even though they were of the wrong size. It took him all that day and part of the next to carry his prizes back to his own hut. He felt that his shelter was well enough hidden to prevent its being discovered, either accidentally or by any party searching for him. Therefore he felt safe in taking the entire contents of the cache.

SUKANABI

With a lamp, and elk fat to burn in it, the lad found there was a great deal to be done inside the cabin before winter came. For instance, he needed some means of cooking inside. That meant a fireplace. And while the elkhide smoked, Ted built his fireplace.

CHAPTER NINETEEN

IN the morning Ted set about building his new fireplace. As the greater part of the hut walls consisted of the bare earth that had covered the sides of the old rock, it was quite easy to dig a hole in one of them. With his knife the boy marked off the shape and size he wanted the opening to be; then he began digging. The knife took a lot of punishment as he scraped against stones in the soil, but with as much care as possible he carved out the hole. He made it large enough so that it could be lined all around the inside with slabs of rock; and when it was finished the opening measured about two feet square, and the hole extended nearly the same depth into the wall. One large slab of stone served as a hearth.

Then came the chimney. Ted had located his fireplace at a point where, thanks to the hill's slope, there were only two or three feet of earth above it. Now he measured out a square on the sod outside, directly above where he estimated the back of the fireplace to be, and started to dig. It was slow work, for he had to loosen the dirt with his knife and then throw it out with his hands; but at last it was done.

The chimney was possibly a foot wide at the top. To make it higher and so provide a better draft, he built it up with rocks. This rock part was about three feet high, and held together with wet clay. Before adding the stone chimney, Ted had plastered the inside of the hole with a layer

of clay, and now did the same to the inside of the rocks. The result was a fairly smooth tube of clay, about six feet in length. Later, when it had been baked well, it proved quite resistant to the weather.

The building of the fireplace took one whole day, and by the time he finished it was getting quite dark outside. Ted lit his lamp and finished sweeping off the wet clay and soil with a pine bough. Now the next thing to do was to get a fire going in the fireplace before the wet clay began to dry out and shrink and crack. With enough heat it would bake evenly and quickly without cracking. He gathered a little tinder pile and took down the lamp to light it. The grass and wood shavings flared up instantly and he thrilled as he saw the tendrils of blue smoke wave up and back to dash up the chimney. That night he proved to himself that he had built his fireplace well. He had remembered the great care that Coiteau had taken to make a kind of shelf at the back of the big fireplace at the post, and he had placed a flat rock in his own chimney in the same position. He didn't understand why it had to be there, but it seemed to do the trick. He piled the fire high with dry wood.

There was only one trouble with his fireplace that night. He had to keep a big fire going in it for several hours in order to bake the fresh clay, and it gave off such a heat in the small room that the boy could not sleep. Lying on the low bed, he had to throw off the warm fur robe and for some time he lay naked while the firelight danced over the walls. For the first time in many days he felt almost at home, with a good solid shelter, plenty of food, and now, best of all, a good fire. Waves of pleasant warmth rolled over him, and as the first fire died down a little the room cooled off enough to let him fall asleep. As he slept, he

dreamed of the great hearths back at York Factory, of the huge joints of beef all dripping and delicious as they turned above the coals.

The weather had been waiting for Ted to finish his fire-place, for while the lad slept before the flames that night, it grew steadily colder outside. The wind rose and swept out of the north in a rising fury, screaming and howling around the jagged rocks of the mountain, buffeting the little hut with its great gusty hands. But inside Ted slept on, unmindful of the storm on the other side of his wall. Except for one tune when he stirred uneasily, a sleepy ear catching but not heeding the roar of the blast, he lay as he had settled while the fire reached hungrily for more fuel and drew back dying.

Sometime in the early hours of the morning the storm stopped. A vast silence, deeper than ever, settled over all the valleys, and perhaps it was this lack of sound that woke Ted. A damp chill filled the room. He opened his eyes to see that his lamp, burning down to the can, had melted all the fat and it flowed in a blazing puddle across his clean hearthstone. Shivering in the raw air he scooped up a handful of dust from the floor and spread it over the burning grease. Then he quickly built up the smouldering fire, and as the heat crept back into his home he snuggled under the squirrel robes and fell asleep again.

By morning the fire had almost gone out, but a few quick puffs made it crackle merrily again and he piled on the last few sticks of the supply in the hut. For the first time then he glanced outside through the open doorway. Hardly believing, he stepped outside into a new world, a world that glittered white in the dawn. For a moment he stood in the doorway, struck by the difference in the familiar scene.

Everything he had come to know and love here on the hill-side was now as unfamiliar as the first day he saw it. For just a minute he felt a quick thrill of panic run through him. Winter had come! Although the wind had died, a blanket of snow lay over everything in sight, covering rocks and grass alike, hiding both beauty and ugliness.

The air itself was not cold, and with the rising of the sun the inch of snow was even then melting and turning the hills back to their own brown colour. Even so, Ted shivered in the still air, for he was still naked. His legs were turning slightly blue as he ducked inside and donned his clothes and threw the robe about his shoulders. With all the speed he could manage he hustled up enough wood to last him the day and quickly retired into his shelter to make his morning meal. When this was finished he ventured outside once again, to find the day warm and pleasant, with only a trace of mud to show there had been snow. His first need from now on was some kind of covering for his feet. Also, if the wind should blow cold from the south, a door would be nice to have.

The elkhide was pretty well smoked when he took it down from the hanger, but it would not go very far toward both clothing and a doorway. There would have to be more hides, and this meant more elk or deer. Clearly another hunting trip was necessary. He carried his elkskin back to the hut and carefully measured it to see how much would be left if he made a door curtain. Then an idea came into his head. The smaller the doorway, the smaller the curtain; and at the moment his doorway stood as tall as himself. Suppose he was to make it just large enough to get in and out of easily, like the door of the cache he had raided?

Then only a small corner of the hide need be sacrificed to cover it.

This was a happy thought, so for the rest of the morning he mixed clay and built up his doorway two feet from the ground, making a low stone wall across it and filling in the square corners with clay to make the opening round. He felt that the smaller the opening was, the less heat could escape. With the doorway walled up as high as he wanted it, he then cut off a portion of the cured hide and hung it across the opening, tacking it with splinters of wood.

By the time this was finished the sun was high, and Ted spent the rest of the daylight hours in building a larger snow-pit and hauling down enough snow to fill it. That night, sitting by his small fire in the hut, he sorted out the various sizes of caps that had been in the cache and with his knife scraped some of the bullets down to the right size for his rifle. The little keg was filled with fresh black powder, and he mixed some of it with what remained in his horn. With rifle and hunting gear ready, he rolled himself in his robe, mentally setting himself to wake before dawn the next day.

In the dull grey before sunup Ted followed the stream up to the waterhole where he had shot the elk, and within an hour was on his way down again with a small deer slung across his shoulders. He had spotted, stalked, and killed it as though he had been doing it all his life. On the way down he took time to pick up the antlers of the elk he had killed before. With this load he staggered back to his camp and spent the rest of the day in skinning, dressing out, cutting up, and packing the meat in his snow-pits. The hide

was cleaned as he had done the elkskin, and left to soak in the little pool.

The deer gave him a good supply of sinew, and with a number of threads on hand he set to work to make a pair of moccasins from the tough elkhide. The thinner, softer deer-skin would be better for trousers, but they would have to wait a few days until the hide was cured properly. With the last rays of the sun, and then in the flickering light of his lamp, Ted traced the outline of his feet on pieces of the yellow hide and spent a couple of hours squatting tailor-fashion on the floor as he sewed together his footwear. The finished moccasins were rough and crudely made, but they covered his feet and laced snugly around his ankles in the Stony way. A good layer of moss would pad his feet and soak up the sweat so that the leather would not get wet and start to rot.

One of the hardest parts of making his own clothing, Ted found, was the preparation of the skins. Besides the soaking and scraping off of fat and hair, and the rubbing in of the liver-and-brains mixture, the hide had to be worked over thoroughly to soften it all through without cracking. The squaws did this by chewing every inch of the skin, but Ted balked at this. There must be some other way. He tried the method he had used with the small squirrel hides, that of rubbing the skin back and forth across a post, and it worked reasonably well, even though it did thoroughly exhaust him in the process. As soon as the skin was soft and pliable enough, he pegged it up in the smokehouse and started the wet-wood fire.

As the days grew colder Ted discovered that he would have to change his way of life a good deal to live indoors. Where he had been able to lie down at the pool to get a

drink, or cook his meals in a hole like the Stonies, it would be necessary to use other methods when it was too cold to go outside. He needed something to hold water and to cook in, some sort of bucket or kettle. Oh, how he wished for one of the fine copper kettles that the Company had traded to the Indians! But then he remembered a trick taught him by Corteau on their trip west. Ted had never seen clay pottery, for the Indians had stopped making such things many years before. But René had made his own pipes and cups out of native clay beside the river, baking them as Ted had baked his fireplace and chimney.

There was a place on the hillside not far from his cabin where there was a deposit of sticky yellow clay. It was here that the boy had got the clay for his fireplace, and now he went back and dug out some pockets of finer-textured material, which he took back to his camp. By the light of his fire he squatted on the dirt floor and fashioned cups, pots, bowls, plates, and a dozen utensils that he felt he might need, and among them he managed to make several large kettles. Most of these things would crack and be spoiled before they were properly baked, but Ted made enough to ensure that at least one of each would be left. When his fireplace was stacked high with these vessels, he built a hot fire of pine cones and twigs in and around them, feeding it carefully and evenly so that the pots would heat properly and uniformly without crumbling.

The making of the pottery filled several days, but at the end of that time he lined up the hearth with a dozen heavy, ugly, but serviceable cups and pots. How many had cracked and broken in the baking he did not remember, but those that remained were, to him, perfect, being smooth and waterproof.

With a whole deer and still some of the elk left in his locker, Ted put off his hunting until other more pressing things had been done at the cabin. There was a great stack of firewood to drag close and break up to pile beside his shack. His need for trousers to replace the ragged ones he wore cost him two days of sewing and cutting, but at least he had something to keep out the icy wind. Of course the job of cutting out and fitting a regular pair of trousers is a task for a tailor. The many pieces that had to be put together to make a pair of pants like a white man wore were too complicated for the boy, so he made his in the fashion of the Indian. Actually the garment was merely a pair of leggings reaching to his waist, where a belt of elkhide held them up at the front and sides, but a large gap was left where the seat should have been. The seat of his old pants, worn and dirty as it was, did duty for that, even though it did not completely cover his bareness in spots. But his short squirrel robe made up the lack, and with his new moccasins he now had a complete outfit.

But now the weather changed for the worse, and each morning was a little colder, each nightfall came a little earlier. Then one frosty morning, when the hills and trees were white with frost, Ted found that all the puddles were covered with a skin of ice. Within the week the ground was once again covered with snow, but this time it stayed. No warm sunlight shone through the grey clouds to melt the blanket. The whole world had turned white and cold. Ted was glad he had put up a supply of wood, and the little hut stayed fairly warm with only a small fire. The squirrel robes proved their worth then, for even with the fire, when he sat or lay still, he felt the cold creeping in. Ted had often heard his father and Corteau and other traders tell about

the fires in winter, how, no matter how big they were, one froze on the back and roasted on the front. And even when he built up a good blaze he found this to be true, especially when he stayed still for any length of time.

With the coming of winter Ted had little to do outdoors. Snow for melting into water was right outside the door, and wood was close at hand. The biggest job was hunting, but even this was a pleasure most of the time. When the weather was not too severe he loved to wander over the hillsides, following the countless tracks, picking out the ones that were freshest and tracing the maker to his resting-place. In this way the boy was able to bag two more of the small deer near the bare hilltop, and the snow-pits were not needed this time. He simply skinned them and hung the gutted carcasses in his smokehouse, while the hides soaked in a hole in the hut floor. To dry the hides, Ted hung them along the front wall, entirely covering the door. And then he made a big discovery.

Every Indian tepee was built around a frame of poles, and around the inside of these poles was hung another covering, an inner lining reaching from the ground to a height of several feet. Sometimes pictures were painted on it, stories of fights or histories of families. But Ted suddenly realized that there was another purpose for the linings. They provided a space between the walls that would stop the cold air from creeping through. This inside wall was always warm and dry. He knew at once that here was the answer to his problem.

Another week of hunting followed, and four animals fell to his rifle, three small deer and another great elk. All the skins were cured and hung around the walls, and the shack soon became so comfortable that he was able to lie around

naked. His smokehouse was full of meat, and he found that it was too much work moving the carcasses out each time he wanted to smoke a hide, so he stopped hunting for a while.

It may seem strange that Ted, a boy of only fourteen, had no fear of the wilds. But he was a wise lad, brought up these past two years by a woodsman, taught woodcraft by experts, knowing and loving all things wild. Only two things could have bothered him - wild animals and lack of food. The beasts gave him not so much as a shiver, for he knew that the only animals that might hurt him were bears, and they had long since gone to their winter sleep. As for starvation - why, he had two pits full of meat outside, besides more than three animals hung in the smokehouse. What did he have to worry about, with a shack like this and a warm fire?

No, he did not worry about his own plight. But his thoughts on those long winter nights often went back to his father, and sometimes even back to his mother. He could hardly remember his mother. How long ago? Two years? And so much had happened since then. But what of his father? And poor old René! Ted found it hard to believe that the Indians would harm them, but it seemed to be true. Well, some day he would make peace with the Indians and try to find out what had happened to the two men. Maybe they had only been taken captive. But Ted knew that Assinibounes seldom take captives. Scalps and horses were their prized possessions. He shivered at these thoughts and put them from his mind by concentrating on improving his hut.

Ted had no way of knowing what day it was, but sometime in the middle of January he woke to the sound of run-

ning water. For a full ten minutes he lay there, listening, trying to figure out what was happening. His mind went back to the flood at Spruce, but that was impossible! It couldn't happen here. Still, as he lay, the tinkling of the stream deepened to a gurgle and the world seemed filled with little sounds of life. He sprang to his feet and dived for the door. The sight that met his eyes was unbelievable. Yet it was true!

Every bit of snow had disappeared from the hills. Water dashed downhill on all sides, filling long-dry beds and washing new ones from the softening soil. Ted shook his head and gasped with pleasure as a gust of warm air struck his naked body. It was hard to understand, but a glimmering of memory came to him. This must be what White Calf had called "the Breath of Chinook." Ted thought of the story of the Indian maiden who had wandered into the hills and become lost, and whenever one of these warm winds came out of the mountains, the natives believed it was her breath blowing on them. Chinook! The first of many that the boy would come to expect and await. He stepped out into the sunlight. A gentle, warm wind was blowing in from the west, and it seemed that spring had come early.

But it was not spring. Ted was soon to find that out. The day stayed warm and by nightfall the land was dry, even though the temperature dropped suddenly to freezing again. The hills were still bare next morning, but it was very cold, and fine for a hunt.

One more skin, Ted told himself, and then he would be satisfied. So with his long gun fully charged and primed, he set out across the hills.

CHAPTER TWENTY

TED picked up his first trail fifteen minutes after leaving the hut. Even though there was no snow on the ground it was easy to see the tracks, for the top of the soil had softened enough to allow footprints. He followed the marks down the hillside and along the valley floor. This was new territory for the hunter. Although he had explored most of the near-by valleys and hills, he had not as yet gone out of his own area, but now the trail led him over the next hill before he caught sight of the animal. Ted dropped down an embankment and ran lightly around to where he thought the elk would pass, and somehow he guessed it just right. It was a great fat buck elk this time, one of the biggest he had ever seen.

He shook just a little as he aimed, and it may have been this that threw his shot off, for when he fired the beast gave a great leap and bounded high over the bushes to disappear on the other side of the hill. Ted stared open-mouthed after it, then he loaded quickly and walked over to where the elk had been standing. As he reached the spot his heart gave a leap, for bright against the brown grass was a definite crimson splash. Blood! The elk was wounded. And the steady trail of red splashes showed that it was hit hard.

With a little sigh of relief Ted grasped his rifle tightly and set out down the steep hill following the blood trail. It led directly down the slope, shining wet in the sun; and the boy followed, eyes never straying from the splashes. So

intent was the lad that he failed to notice the sudden change in the weather. Behind him, far to the north, an immense black cloud was piling up. With each passing minute the sky grew darker and the storm raced onward until it towered above the valley, reaching far over to blot out the sun. Only when the light began to fail did the lad look up from his trail. In a flash he realized what was about to happen. Blizzard! He had seen such a storm at Edmonton, but here in the mountains, possibly five miles from his shelter, it held a terrible threat for him and he was well aware of the danger. Even as he stared up at the billowing blackness the first light flakes began to swirl, and then, high up on the mountain, sweeping down through the pines, came the moan of the wind. The snow began to fall more steadily and he turned homewards, eyes searching the hillsides for any possible shelter in case he could not reach his hut in time.

The wind caught him then, pushing him back as he staggered against it. The snow increased until it swirled and boiled all around. Ahead lay the dark mass of forest and he headed directly toward it, hoping to find some relief from the tearing wind. Before he reached the shelter of the trees the storm settled over him in all its raging fury and he stumbled blindly into it, feeling the freezing bite of it through his buckskins. The snow whapped round and round before his eyes and he felt himself growing dizzy. He could no longer see anything in front and his vision was cut to only a few feet. Blinded and numbed by the white terror, he wandered at the will of the wind, losing all sense of direction. He never reached the trees.

Head down, shoulders hunched, Ted lurched forward step by step until his way was barred by a huge black shape.

He stopped and stared at it, and presently realized that it was the dead trunk of a great fire-killed tree. He stumbled around it and kept on going through the screaming whirlwind of snow. The force of it staggered him, threw him off balance. He braced himself against it as well as possible, stretching one bare blue hand in front of him to grope his way through the gloom. Foot by foot he fought the blizzard, working his way steadily towards where he thought the life-saving forest should be.

Little by little the wind had shifted, but the wanderer, not knowing this, kept his face to it, heading in the direction he still thought was north. The wind was coming from due east now. It whipped and swept around him, throwing powdered ice in his face and up under his robe. His hands were numb and unfeeling, so he thrust the free one under his cloak, beneath his armpit, to warm it a little. The other hand still stiffly clutched his rifle.

Then a heavy blow sent him reeling back. Recovering, he groped before him to find out what he had run into; and his heart sank to his moccasins when he realized what it was. It was the same dead tree he had almost run into before. He had gone around in a complete circle; he was lost!

Painfully Ted made his way around to the other side of the tree, where the wind was not so strong, and it was here that he found shelter at last. The fire that had killed the tree had burned out the inside of the stump, making a great hollow space that reached deep between the huge roots to form a small cave. Here he curled himself into a ball under the fur robe and rested while he warmed his hands and listened to the roar of the storm as it thundered past.

When his hands were a little warmer and no longer pained him so much, he reached out around him in the

darkness. Far under the roots he felt dry ground and dead pine needles. The cave sloped back another few feet, and Ted crawled farther in under the roots. The wind seemed far away now. There was hard, dry ground under him, and dead needles and grass were piled high all around. He offered a silent prayer of thanks for the forethought that had prompted him, many weeks past, to make the little elkkin pouch that he carried at his waist. In it were several things that were needed now.

Carefully he cleared away a circle down to the bare earth, and in the centre of it made a little pile of dry grass and pine needles. Then he took his flint from the pouch and with his knife struck a spark. The first few sparks flashed and died, but there was plenty of gunpowder in his horn, and when the next spark fell on a little pile of it under the tinder, the heap burst into flame immediately.

Ted cut a few larger twigs into slivers and fed them carefully to the tiny blaze, and as his fire licked up bravely he was able to see what kind of place he was in. He was quite surprised to see what a large hollow there was under this tree. Evidently the core had burned completely out, leaving only a thin shell. The hollow reached out of sight above him and was perhaps four feet across at the widest place. The sides were black with charcoal, and Ted shaved off a few large splinters for firewood.

All that night the storm continued without change. Ted dozed a little by his fire, but the unending chill kept him awake enough to feed the blaze. He stuck his head up between the roots to have a look at the weather when morning came, but he could not see much. The wind was as strong as on the day before, and the raging blizzard covered everything. He was forced to dig some snow away

from the entrance to the cave before he was able to crawl out, and he began to worry about being snowed in. He slid back to his fire, picking up a few damp sticks on the way. Well, nothing to do but wait until the storm let up. He ate a little of the dried meat he carried in his pouch and dozed some more as the chill lessened.

A well-known feeling woke him the next time. He had no idea how long he had slept, but very definitely he was hungry! In his pouch he had a few pieces of dried meat and a small package of pemmican, and he ate all of it, knowing that the storm could not last another day and he would be home in quick time once he got out. With his little meal finished, he fell asleep again.

When he awoke again there was no sound from outside. He built up the fire for light and crawled up the passageway to have a look. But there was no hole! He was completely snowed in. For a second or two he lay there thinking wildly, and his first reaction was a small panic that set him to digging at the snow with his hands. The fact that his hands were bare made him stop, and he began to think reasonably. He slid back down the short tunnel and put some more splinters on the fire. The flames flickered brightly, and the smoke climbed upward into the darkness and disappeared. That meant there must be an outlet somewhere, that he would not smother. It struck him that the tree must have burned out all the way up, making a kind of natural chimney and ventilator.

Ted turned on his back in the cramped space and wriggled around the fire until his face was directly under the main part of the tree. Sure enough, far up the dark trunk was the blue of the sky. The blue sky! Then the

storm must be over! He could get out and go home. If he could get out, that was.

Knife in hand, he crawled over to the front of the cave and chose a root that stuck out of the snow and ice. His idea was to cut a section of this root and whittle it into some kind of tool to use in clearing a tunnel through to the open air. He would have to work as fast as he could, for even then he could feel the renewed ache of hunger in his stomach. He sat close by the root and gripped it with one hand while he chopped at it. In the dim light of the fire he could not see it very clearly, but he was startled by the feel of it. The root seemed to be covered with hair. He lit a long splinter of wood and held it close. It was not a root at all. It was the leg of an animal! Then the truth dawned on him. It must be the body of the very elk he had been following. With a few quick slashes he cleared the snow from the upper part of the leg and cut off enough meat to make a good meal. Back at the fire, he toasted the elk meat on the point of his knife and tucked away every morsel he had cut off.

Then came the digging out. This time he found the root he was looking for and it took him half an hour of chopping to cut it loose. The chips from his whittling fed the fire steadily as he flattened the root on both sides, just enough to give him an edge with which to cut the packed snow and shovel it out of the way. Then he attacked the barrier at the upper end of his burrow. Close beside him he kept the precious rifle, for as he dug he pushed the snow under and behind him, sealing the passage as he went. If he did not make it to safety in a short time, the air in this close tunnel would give out, but there was no other chance.

For an hour he dug steadily upwards inch by inch

through the packed snow near the ground. In order to be able to crawl and work, he cut the tunnel on an angle of about forty-five degrees, so he could not tell how far he was rising through the snow. How deep was this snow, anyway? He had gone nearly twelve feet already, as close as he could figure. The snow was getting softer as he went up, for the closer to the top, the less weight there was to pack it. He began to notice the difference, and the snow grew lighter and lighter as he worked. Then, with one wild stroke, his stick broke through the crust. With a cry he leaped upwards, or tried to. As he forced himself upright on the surface, he sank to his waist in the soft upper layers. The crust was not thick enough to support him.

The light was the brightest he had ever seen. It took many minutes for his eyes to become used to even the dark blue of the sky, and he dared not look for long at the snow, remembering the warning of White Calf and the experiences of the Indians and traders at the bay. As quickly as possible he slashed a strip of leather from his hunting pouch and cut two narrow slits in it. With these crude snow-goggles tied around his head, he found that he could see quite clearly through the slits, even in the dazzling reflection of sun on snow.

His next need was some means of walking over the drifts; and that meant, of course, snowshoes. He had seen them used at York Factory and at Edmonton, and knew enough about them to make a crude pair for himself. Near by was a small clump of trees that would provide the necessary materials, and, crawling on his stomach through the soft snow, he made his laborious way to it.

Cutting off a slim pine bough, he bent it into a loop and bound the projecting ends together. Then he wove other

boughs criss-cross through and around this frame until they formed a flat mat. When two of these clumsy contrivances were finished, he cut two long thongs from the strap of his pouch and used them to lash the snowshoes to his feet. He was pleased to find that the light crust would now bear him very well, and he started for home.

On reaching his hut again, Ted rested and relaxed. He was little the worse from his experience, but he was mystified, a few weeks later, to find the skin peeling off his fingers. He had never seen frostbite before, but after the pain of his hands during the blizzard he decided that a pair of mittens would be useful. While the dead flesh stripped from the worst of his hurts, he fashioned a stout pair of elk-skin mitts, tied together on a long thong that would go around his neck, and lined with squirrel fur.

Another thing he wanted, and set about making, was a jacket. One of the cured deerskins was large enough for what Ted had in mind, and he was well satisfied with the garment when it was finished. There was enough hide left over to make a cover for his rifle, too, and he felt that this was quite necessary since the rifle had filled with snow and frozen solid when he crawled from the snowdrift. Both the jacket and the case were easy to make, and he took special care to pull the stitches tight and smooth.

When these items were finished, Ted looked at them with great pride. His first efforts, the moccasins and the leggings, had been rather rough, but with all this practice he began to make his jobs a little fancier. With plenty of time on his hands and lots of material, he found it rather fun to see how nicely he could do this work. All around the seams of the jacket and gun-case he left two or three inches of leather sticking out, and when all the sewing was finished

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he took his knife and slashed this edge all the way around, making a short fringe. By the time the jacket and gun-case were both completed, he felt sure that even the Indians could not do much better.

And so the time passed, and Ted found ways to make his life more comfortable and pleasant. From the struggle for existence that he had known, he passed into a period that taught him many ways to be rich and happy with little. Gradually, he became part of the things around him, the snow, the sky, and the hills; and by the time spring showed signs of returning, he had grown to know and love his mountain home.

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

As the snow disappeared and the days grew longer, Ted began to think of the outside world. For seven months he had stayed close to his cabin, a prisoner in these mountain valleys. Now he could not help wondering what was going on out on the prairies, out at Spitzee. Where were the Indians he knew? Where was White Calf? He found himself gazing into his fire and wanting to go down the river to find out. Well, why not? He had made the trip upstream without being discovered. Why could he not make a little scouting trip to see what was happening? Perhaps there would be a wagon train or some other white men going past. Perhaps he could go with them back to Edmonton. The idea pleased him, and he resolved to start out as soon as possible.

The snow that lay deep in the valleys had not yet started to melt when Ted blocked up his hut door with stones and laid a stone across the chimney to keep out pack rats. The hilltops were bare, though, and it was easy going to follow them along just above the drifted trail. Where the river dashed through the vee-shaped notch to pass the first range, Ted found that he could follow it on the gravel at the sides, for the stream had not yet filled out to its normal width. Once past the canyon and out of the mountains, he made good time downstream. This trip was much different from the one coming up the previous fall, for now he wore stout moccasins and carried enough dried food in his pouch

to last him a week if need be. This meant that he did not have to spend half the day hunting. And he did not have to carry a glowing punk to light his fires, his flint saved all that bother.

The first day of travel took him across the first great valley, and now he was able to take time to look around him. From the rim of this valley he could look out over the prairies, right down to Spuzzee fifty miles away. His heart beat fast at the sight of the dark line of trees along the river. He moved openly, by daylight, now, keeping his eyes open for any sign of danger or trouble. At night he curled himself snugly in his robe and slept without worry about being discovered. Months in the mountains had toughened him in both body and mind, so that he faced the coming day without fear. Instead of sneaking and crawling along the river bottom, he travelled boldly on the best trail he could find, trusting his senses to keep him safe.

It was on the second day of his journey that he met the Indians. They were filing along the north bank towards Ted as he headed downstream, and the singing of the squaws announced their approach long before he actually saw them. From a well-screened hiding-place Ted watched them as they moved past. There were several families, he guessed, with all their camp gear, so he figured that they were heading into the foothills. He waited perhaps fifteen minutes after the last squaw and travois had passed, knowing that often the younger members of the tribe would linger behind to hunt or play. When no more natives came, he swung back into the trail and continued eastward.

He had been travelling since sunup that morning, and at midday his stomach told him it was time for a bite of food. He dropped over the bank to the river and opened the little

package of dried meat he carried. With the sweet water of Spitzer River to drink, and well-seasoned elk jerky to eat, he made a good meal, lying awhile afterward to rest his legs. And it was while he was lying thus that he heard the horse. He heard it whinny softly somewhere above, on the trail; and rolling instantly into a clump of grass, he took stock of the sounds that followed.

His ears picked up a number of noises, and then he heard the soft guttural voices of Stonies. They were young voices, boys, from the sound of it, and although Ted could not quite catch what they said, he knew they were pocketing their ponies. A moment later the voices came from the river bank, and he slowly poked his head out of the grass to have a look. A large growth of willows screened them from him, so he couldn't see what they were doing, but there came a splashing and laughing and he supposed they were playing in the water. He crawled quietly up the bank and looked over.

Three horses stood there, not ten feet from him, tied loosely to the willows, and their owners were downstream a good hundred yards, hidden behind the bushes. Ted could not see any of the Indians so he was pretty sure they couldn't see him either, and a brave idea came to him. The fastest way of travelling on the prairies was by horse-back, and here were horses for the taking. He didn't worry about the fact that he would be stealing them. These Indians would do the same to him if they had the chance. He scrambled up the bank and crept on hands and knees toward the tethered animals.

As he came up to them the horses stood very still. No doubt they were getting used to being stolen, but before Ted could untie even one of them the voices began to come

closer. He dived into the nearest cover, a thick clump of grass. On his stomach, not daring to move even enough to turn around so he could see, the white boy lay motionless as the three Indian youths came back to their horses. They seemed in happy spirits, for two of them broke into a run and with hardly a pause to untie their mounts, leaped astride them and pounded off up the trail.

The boy who was left had evidently tied his horse more securely than the others, and it took him a couple of minutes to undo the knot. While he fumbled at the rope, his pony danced impatiently around him, anxious to be off with the others. Ted took advantage of the noise to turn his head enough to see what was happening. The Indian boy stood with his back toward the hidden one, and the pony pawed and pranced close to him. Ted sized the lad up carefully. He wanted that horse, and there would be only one chance to get it. But he did not care to hurt the lad. Perhaps if he could knock him unconscious long enough to get away on the pony—— The Indian would have to walk to the camp, but it wouldn't hurt him for once.

Ted began to rise from the ground, sliding his rifle closer in case he might need it. He was only a few yards from the Indian when he stood up in a half-crouch and took a step forward. The native still worked at the tangled rope, for his chums had played this trick on him and he was planning some kind of punishment for them. Holding his rifle ready, Ted used all the stalking skill he knew to creep up on his victim. The horse pranced excitedly but his owner seemed unaware of the danger. Ted was six feet away when some kind of warning reached the Indian—it may have been Ted's approach, or it may have been some inner feeling. He whirled, whipping a long, gleaming knife from his

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waistband as he faced Ted. Ted swung up the rifle, cocking it, and for the space of a long breath the two lads faced each other.

"Sukanabi!" cried the Indian.

"White Calf!" Ted almost howled. And the two friends dropped their weapons and flung themselves into each other's arms. For long minutes they stood so, pounding each other on the back and laughing and crying at the same time. When finally they did let each other go, the two friends stood, almost unable to speak for happiness, looking deep into each other's eyes.

"Sukanabi!" the Indian said again, "I was afraid you were killed in the battle. I searched the whole forest for many days, but I could not find trace of you. I have grieved much since then."

"I've thought of you a lot, too, White Calf," replied Ted. "I just had to come and see if I could find you or some of my other friends."

"But where have you been these many months? Do you not know it is very dangerous for you to walk in this part of the country now?" His eyes clouded with concern for Ted's safety. "My people have made war on all whites. If you were seen now you would be killed. Let us go into the trees where we may talk without fear of discovery. My friends may come back to find me." He led the way into a deep part of the bushes and here the friends sat and talked for an hour, and Ted told of his wonderful life in the mountains.

"I am filled with joy for you, brother," said White Calf with relief, "I will be happy when there is peace on the prairies again. My father is very sad about this thing. The bad traders still come into Spitzer Anota with their whiskey

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and guns, and some of my people still give all their possessions for the bad medicine. But when there is no whiskey, then these foolish men are angry, and they raid the forts all the time. I think it would be wise for you to go back to your lodge and stay there for a little while longer. Maybe in a year it will be better and you will come again to our country and you and your father and the little man may come back to trade with us."

At the mention of his father and René, Ted cried:

"But we can't. At least, I don't know if they are still alive or not. Don't you know anything about them?"

"Only that they were unharmed the last time I saw them. They feared you were dead. Some of our young men had captured them and burned your post, but our chief ordered their release. They left this part of the country and I have not heard of them since."

"Thank God!" whispered Ted fervently. "Now I have something to work for. I'll be able to live happier while I'm alone in the mountains. Some day I'll come out, when there's peace here, and I'll search for them until I find them."

"And I will ride beside you, brother," promised White Calf. "But it is late, and my family will begin to wonder what has happened to me. Are you going back to the hills?"

"Yes, I guess I will," replied Ted, picking up his rifle. "I've learned what I wanted to know, there's no need for me to go any farther. I guess I'll head back to my cabin."

"Do you have enough food and powder to last for a while?" asked his friend, as they walked back to the trail.

"I think so. I've got plenty of powder and shot. But I

could use some more flour, though. And some salt. Can you get me some?"

"I will leave a pouch by the trail when we break camp in the morning," said White Calf. "If you follow our trail, you can pick it up on the way."

"Fine!" Ted stopped as they came out on the trail. "You know, White Calf, just for the fun of it, I think I'd like to go back down to Spitzer and see what's left there. Maybe I'll meet someone else there who can tell me where Father and René have gone."

"It is very dangerous and foolish, I think, Sukanabi. But if you must go, take the trail on the other side of the river. It is not so well travelled as this one, but it is much shorter. You are only half a day's travel from the Medicine Trees now."

"Thanks, brother" Ted took the Indian's hand in his own. "I can make it very quickly if I keep going. I'm pretty good at it now. I'll pick up the grub in the morning. Then I'll follow your camp until we get into the hills. Good-bye." With a wave of his bare brown arm, the Indian boy jumped on the pony's back and trotted off upstream.

Ted crossed the river as he had been advised, and soon found the trail there. For about fifteen miles it led along the river bottom, winding and twisting to the course of the stream, until late in the afternoon he came out suddenly at the island. It was the upper end of the island, but the boy knew it and followed down the south branch until he was opposite the Medicine Trees. Here, just as on the previous year, a pile of offerings lay between the trunks; and out in the clearing, black and still, stood the remains of the fort. It had not burned all the way to the ground and in places the walls rose to a height of three feet. Making sure that all

was clear, Ted waded the stream and crept around the edge of the clearing to the runs. Darkness fell before he had finished his exploring, and he curled up under the willows and fell asleep, not knowing what the next day would bring.

Ted woke late the next morning. A large group of Indians had come to the Tree and as he watched they laid food and tobacco at its base. These savages seemed little different from the last time he had seen them, and yet he knew that if they discovered him here, things would probably go pretty roughly for him. He hugged the ground and stroked his long gun. The Indians left the island in an hour or so, and Ted crept out to finish his search. But before he had even started, a familiar sound reached his ears. It was the shriek of ungreased axles. Wagons! And wagons meant white men. He almost cheered as he jumped to his feet and raced across the clearing to where the rough roadway started. As he reached it, a large party of horsemen rode into view through the bushes. They had not as yet seen him, and he remembered White Calf's words about the whiskey traders still being in the district. The lad ducked quickly into the bushes beside the road.

As he watched, the group went past slowly, the heavily laden wagons ricking and swaying and groaning over the rough trail. There were about ten men this time, with three great wooden wagons. Whiskey, Ted told himself angrily. He was about to slink away into the undergrowth when a familiar face caught his eye.

For a full minute he stared at the man who rode behind the last wagon. The heavy dark features had not changed a bit in the past year. Ted recognized him as the boss of this outfit, Taggert! If he had ever had any idea of making

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friends with these men in hopes of going back with them, he changed his mind now. Nothing could be worse than these fellows. He waited while the wagons and riders turned out into the clearing and headed toward the ruined post. Then he crawled quickly into deeper brush, on his way to the north bank and the trail home.

The holy, peaceful atmosphere of the island seemed to have completely disappeared since the coming of the traders. Instead of a place of worship, it had become a place of violence and murder. No sooner had Ted returned to the hollow in the willows where he had left his gear, than loud angry voices rose from the clearing. He wriggled over to watch what was going on. The cavalcade had halted beside the old post, and the men had dismounted and were standing around one of the wagons. One of them seemed to be arguing with Taggert, and Ted was just in time to hear the words:

" — There's only one boss in this here outfit, an' that's me. An' no ornery skunk is gonna tell me what to do." As he spoke these words, Taggert swung a huge fist at the other fellow. The man fell as though struck by a club, but in an instant he had rolled to his knees, clawing at a small leather pouch hanging from his belt. Ted's eyes were on the fallen man so he didn't see the pistol come into Taggert's hand. The fellow on the ground managed to draw his revolver from its case, but a terrific explosion cracked through the silent trees, and in a cloud of powder smoke the man sagged suddenly. Taggert eyed him savagely while the others stood looking on. Not one of them moved. The wounded man struggled to his feet, all the fight gone out of him. Still clutching his unfired gun, he glared at Taggert's levelled

pistol. Then, holding one hand to his shoulder, he lurched off toward the river to clean his wound.

To Ted's terror the shortest path to the river lay directly across the little opening where the boy crouched, and the bleeding ruffian stumbled over him before he could get out of sight.

"What the——" grunted the injured man as he went to his knees. Then he caught sight of Ted's bare brown body in the deep shadows. His eyes flew wide with fear, and the pistol dropped from his shaking hand. With mouth wide in terror, trying to voice some sound, he whirled and scrambled through the brush towards his friends, leaving Ted to stare in amazement.

Then the truth dawned on Ted. The man had mistaken him for an Indian, and where there was one Indian, there were undoubtedly a thousand more. They were probably surrounded! He watched as the man ran back to his friends, and he drew his rifle up, determined to sell his life dearly if they should attack him. He cocked his gun and lay waiting.

But he was totally unprepared for what happened next. The whole lot of them rushed for the shelter of the wagons and the remains of the post, whipping out guns and rifles as they ran. In another moment not one was to be seen. Only the long sticks of rifle barrels showed where the men lay waiting for the attack they were sure was about to begin.

Ted lay closer to the ground and backed slowly away into the bush. As he crawled over the grass a hard object dug into his stomach and he rolled a bit to reach under and remove the obstruction. His hand closed over the barrel of the lost pistol. He gripped it tightly, rolled to his side and

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slipped the gun into his hunting pouch. Then he continued his escape into the bushes.

Once in the shelter of the deep woods, he rose to his feet and padded quickly to the river. Crossing the shallows, he dived into bushes again and was swallowed up in the green shadows. How long the traders lay ready to fight, he did not know. Nor did he care.

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

All that night Ted stayed on the trail of the Indian party, following them to where they had camped. On the way he picked up two buckskin bags that White Calf had hung from a dead tree. Then, on the next morning, when he saw the natives moving off across the river southward, he left them, continuing on upstream along the banks of the Spitzee. He slung the bags across his back with two straps of elkhide, and their comfortable weight reminded him all the time of his friend White Calf. As he climbed a rise of ground and looked back to where the Indians had gone, he saw a small lone figure standing by the trail, arm raised in the sign of blessing and friendship. Ted raised his own arm, and upon that signal the other lad sprang to the back of his waiting pony and trotted off into the trees. The white boy had never felt more lonely than now. He stood on the hill for a few minutes, wishing he could join the Indians in their camp.

Then he turned and went on his way, passing familiar landmarks beside the river. He remembered again the first trip he had made along this river, the weeks of fearful travelling, hiding at the slightest hint of danger, moving only when he had to, eating only when he could find game. The journey that had taken weeks a year ago now took only days, and almost before he knew it the hills were in front of him. Once through the gorge, which was now almost filled with the roaring floodwaters of melting snows, Ted

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again fell into the trail down the valley, and he followed it to his own hill. From the trail he could see no sign of his hut, so well had he hidden it, and even after climbing the hillside and approaching quite close, it was not easy to find. In fact, when he first looked for some sign of it, he thought perhaps he was on the wrong hill. But the stream was there, and a few more steps brought him around the corner and within sight of it.

Although he had been gone only about a week, it seemed ages since he had last seen the place, and the pleasure of coming home made him forget his tiredness enough to whistle cheerfully and loudly as he went about his chores.

"En roulant, ma boule, roulent, roulent——"

He sang the old French song which he had learned from the voyageurs, and it made him think of the far north country which he had left so long ago. Would he ever see it again? he wondered. And the great Saskatchewan? The long northern canoes and the forts? Well, it didn't matter much, anyhow. This country was where he wanted to be, and now that he knew his father was alive the boy counted the days he must wait before he again ventured outside to find him.

The fresh green spring soon turned into summer, and Ted spent his time exploring the hills and valleys around him. His snow locker was still filled with good meat when he returned from the short trip to Spitzee, and the small supply of flour added tenfold to his food stores. As soon as he lit his fire and cleaned up a bit from the journey, he turned his attention to these things. As he tipped up the leather pouch to pour the flour into his box, something else

fell out. It was a small package done up in deerskin, smelling strongly of smoke and leather. When he unrolled it, Ted held a pair of the handsomest beaded gauntlets he had ever seen. The gloves were made of thin white doe-skin stitched neatly with sinews, while the heavy elkskin arm-pieces were almost entirely covered with bright designs of flowers done in tiny coloured beads. Ted smiled happily as he looked at this gift from his savage brother. He laid the gloves on a shelf and opened the salt bag.

Here again he found something that was not expected. There was another bag inside this one. He poured the salt into a little clay cup and opened the other sack. A strong dry smell came up as he untied the strings, and told him what it was. Tea! The tiny black leaves crackled as he handled them. Tea was the main drink on the prairies, used by Indian and white man alike. It formed the biggest part of the Company's trade goods, and no voyageur or woodsmen would do without it unless he had to. Ted had not tasted the drink since his last day at the post on Spitzee, but now he lost no time in setting a pot of water to boil. And while he waited for it to heat up enough to make his tea, he opened his hunting pouch to clean out the bits of dried meat and pemmican that were left in it.

He dumped the bag out on the floor, and from the pile of food, his flint, extra caps and balls, and so on, he picked out the great shining lump of the pistol. Ted had never actually handled one before, although he had seen many men carrying them. His father had claimed that only men looking for trouble or expecting it would carry such a thing, for they were good only for shooting other men at close range. A hunter would not have much success trying to bring home meat with a pistol. But Ted was rather inter-

ested in the weapon. When he had cleaned off the grease and bits of food that stuck to it, the gun lay in his hands, heavy and sparkling like silver.

It was a huge thing, fully as heavy as his rifle, and long enough to reach from his fingertips nearly to his elbow. The whole gun shone brightly in the firelight, and its dark wooden butt plates gleamed softly with much wear. Some tiny letters were stamped on the barrel, and he was just able to make out the words "E. Remington & Sons" and the figures "1863." Why, this gun was only a few years old! It was exactly the same kind that some of the men at Edmonton had used.

He remembered watching some of the men cleaning their guns. One fellow had been cleaning a revolver just like this one, and Ted tried now to duplicate his actions. The boy fingered the barrel for a minute before he tripped the little catch just under the end. When this was pressed, a short rod under the barrel folded down and became a sort of lever or handle. At the end of this handle was a tiny ramrod, and each time the lever was pulled down, the ramrod poked into a hole in the cylinder. Ted knew that this cylinder turned around on an axle, and that the holes in it held the charges. These holes too, had names, and the boy thought for a while before the word came to him. Chambers, that was what they were called.

He studied the gun carefully. Actually, he found out, it was much the same as his old rifle, only much shorter. To load the gun, one poured powder into the open end of a chamber, placed a lead ball on top, pushed down the lever of the ramrod, ramming the ball down on top of the charge. When this had been done five times, the cylinder was loaded. At the back end of each chamber there was a

nipple, and the caps that fitted on them were the same kind as Ted used for his rifle, only much smaller.

As Ted looked down the front ends of the chambers, he could see that each one had a ball in it, and each nipple held a cap. The gun was fully loaded and ready for business. He treated it with great respect until all the caps were removed and set on a rock some distance away. Then he experimented with the hammer and trigger. With all the strength of his two hands, he managed to draw the hammer back until it clicked into full cock. As it did so, he was thrilled to see the cylinder slowly turn until another chamber was in front of the muzzle. As each shot was fired, the cylinder would turn to line up the next ball. It was truly amazing.

With a bit of experimenting he discovered how to take the whole cylinder out of the frame, for he knew that sometimes the men would carry two or three fully loaded cylinders with them, and when one was empty, simply take it out and put in another. With another thought in mind, he took up his own cap box and tried one of the copper caps on the small nipples. He was disappointed to find that they would not fit. When the cylinder turned, the caps caught on the frame and stuck there. That meant he had only five shots for this gun.

Putting the weapon back together again, he played at shooting with it, holding it at arm's length and aiming at a cup on the shelf. But hardly had the gun levelled at the target before his arm was tired, and he dropped it to his side. He tried it again, and managed to hold it steady long enough to get a bead on the cup. No, it wasn't going to do him much good. He cut off a piece of deerskin, wrapped the loaded revolver in it, and stored it away.

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His trip to Spitzee had shown Ted that he would have to spend another winter in this valley, so he turned his hand to fixing up his camp in preparation for the months to come. First on his job list was the enlarging of the hut. It was quite a problem but, with a little careful planning, he managed to figure out a way. The back of his present hut was the solid slab of rock, so that could not be changed. The front was a wall, and his doorway, and he could do nothing to extend that. His fireplace covered a good part of one dirt wall, and what space was left at the inner end was taken up with shelves cut into the bank. That left only one wall, and he went to work on that. Although the soil was rocky, he managed to cut an opening into the wall, and when the tunnel was two feet deep he started widening it as he went.

The new room grew slowly in size as the boy scooped out dirt and rock, finally clearing out a cave some six feet wide and eight feet long. It wasn't a very square room, to be sure, for large outcroppings of stone stuck out in several places and a great flat slab of stone sloped sharply overhead, forcing him to dig the floor down about two feet to allow him to stand upright. The doorway between the two rooms was about two feet wide and four high, just large enough for Ted to step through, otherwise there would be no support for the log roof on that side. When the new room had been scraped and swept out thoroughly with his pine-bough broom, he went all over the floor, jumping and stamping on it to beat it to a solid, hard finish which could be easily cleaned.

This room was to be a storeroom, for he now had a good deal of gear that must be kept out of the weather. A few shelves cut into the walls held his keg of powder and the extra lead balls. The box of flour sat in one corner, with

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the bag of salt on it where it would keep dry. Out of some small logs and sticks he built a rough table and a bench to go with it, which made the hut seem quite homelike. The only trouble was that now the room seemed to need a better light. Ted did not take long to make a new lamp. He went back to the place where he had found the clay for his pots, and with a good mixture he fashioned a squat, heavy pitcher with a long spout. Through the hollow tube of this spout he drew a roll of soft deerskin so that only a short end stuck out. The other end of the roll lay in a bath of fat with which the pitcher was filled. A handle on the other side of the jar allowed him to move it around wherever he wanted without melted grease spalling all over the place. He found that when a strip of rawhide was tied around the lamp, it could be hung from a beam on the roof, and its bright flame cast a good light downwards. The old tin-can lamp was now banished to the storeroom.

The days were growing warmer and warmer now, as summer advanced, and Ted took great care at all times. In many places he had come across the tracks of bears. The only thing that bothered him was the possibility that they might find his snow-pits and steal the meat. Somehow they missed the pits. It might have been that the frozen meat gave off no smell to tempt the beasts, but at any rate they stayed far away from the camp, knowing and fearing the smell of Man.

With plenty of time to spare now, Ted began to wander away from his hill, looking to the west, to the nearest peaks. The sharp blue rocks held him in their spell, and when he could no longer stay away, he packed his pouch with grub and set out. Directly to the west lay a long, low, flat-topped

mountain, streaked with snow even in the middle of summer; and toward this Ted set out. In a couple of hours, after crossing several large hills and valleys and winding along deep green forests, he came to the last steep foothill. As he gazed upward to the heights above him the mountain seemed to lean outward. For a moment, while he looked, he was afraid the whole mass was about to fall on him. When he looked down again, the world settled back to its proper place.

As he started up the hill the slope flattened out a great deal and was not so hard to climb as it had first appeared. Within the hour he came out upon the top of the hill, right where the timber shrivelled away to a few stunted pines. Here was the base of the huge peak, from this point on there was nothing but solid rock and snow. Ted sat on a stone and stared. He had no intention of trying to climb to the top, this was thrill enough for him.

Then, as he drank in the beauty of the mountain, a movement far up the grey slope caught his eye. There, a thousand feet above him, stood some kind of animal. It showed up plainly against the darker rocks, for it was as white as a rabbit in winter. It seemed to hang to sheer cliffs without any effort at all. The goat, for that was what it was, walked easily along a narrow ledge and, without even a pause, leaped ten feet upwards to land nimbly on another ledge that Ted could not even see. Another goat appeared out of nowhere, and soon there were an even dozen of the snowy animals leaping and bouncing all over the mountain. They all followed the tracks of the first, and as Ted watched, they disappeared, one by one, over the ridge.

The sun was high above him when he turned down the hill. He felt entirely satisfied. He had been on a mountain,

and most of the people he knew had never even seen a mountain. Wait till he told Repé about it! The hillside was steep and slippery with green grass as he went down.

Two hours later he was again climbing his own hill. As he rounded the corner and headed for the hut, a noise caught his ear. It was the whinny of a horse, echoing faintly up the valley. Instantly he dropped to the ground and froze motionless; then he realized that the horse must be on the trail below him, and if so, the rider could not possibly have seen him. He rose to a crouch and crept cautiously around to where he could look down on the trail.

A line of riders was just coming past his hill. There were about ten Indians in the party, and each man led two or three pack animals. They were headed north, up the valley toward the Spitzee River, and Ted guessed they were the hunters on their way to the plains for the annual hunt. He wondered what they had done about the robbed cache down the trail. They didn't seem to be angry or looking for anyone. They probably had plenty of supplies. He watched with relief as they wound around the next hill and headed for the trail through the mountains. He would have to be careful for the next two weeks or so, for they would be coming back again sometime in the next month. He knew they would have to start back soon, for winter was not more than two months off and they would not get caught in the mountains when it arrived.

Ted was reflecting on how fast the last few months had gone past, and it was this that made him remember something. Sometime during the last three months he had become a year older. He had completely forgotten his birthday. How old was he now? Fifteen? Well, this was as good

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a day as any to celebrate. Reaching home, he dug a deer tongue out of his locker and boiled it for supper. With a bit of his precious flour and salt he made several little cakes or bannocks, placing them on the hot hearthstone to bake. These bannocks, eaten smoking hot with slices of the tongue, washed down with steaming cups of black tea, made Ted think again of Fort Edmonton at Christmastime. Yes, it was quite a party he had that night, all by himself.

The summer was almost over when Ted realized it was time to start laying in his winter's supply of meat. He cleaned out both snow-pits and refilled them with fresh, clean snow. Any of the remaining meat that was too old or too dry to suit his taste, he threw far down the hill so the bears and coyotes would not come near.

While he was at this task the Indians came back. It was from the snow patch up the hill that he first saw them. The leaders of the file had just come into sight. Ted sat on the hillside and watched as they filed past his hidden camp. Something about them was different, aside from the loaded pack ponies. There seemed to be more of them. He waited until they passed out of view, then dropped down into the valley and ran along to head them off. As he lay waiting beside the trail, they plodded steadily toward him. Sure enough, as they moved past, he counted four more than when they had come. They passed without spotting him and he waited a few minutes to make sure the trail was clear. Then he stepped onto the path and headed back home.

Now that the greatest danger had passed, Ted knew he must settle down to some serious hunting, for the days were

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sliding by at a frightening rate. As he walked, he planned the hunt that he would start the very next morning. So deep in thought was he that he rounded the hill and almost ran right into the horse that stood there. For a full minute he stood there looking at it. He couldn't seem to understand it. What would a horse be doing there? Then he moved quickly into the jumble of rocks on the hillside. A horse! And where there was a horse there was sure to be an Indian! He brought up his rifle and checked the lock and cap. Then, ever so silently, he started up the hill around and above the horse, moving in a straight line toward his hut. The hut was on a level about fifty feet above the horse, and Ted went straight up the hill, then cut sharply across to the camp.

His eyes and ears strained steadily as he advanced. Perhaps there was only one Indian. In that case it would be easy. He didn't like the idea of shooting anyone, but he also did not like the idea of anyone shooting him. He could not have this fellow getting away to tell the others. One quick, true shot would have to do. Ted levelled the rifle in front of him, ready to snap it to his shoulder at the first sign of danger. Alert and eager, he dropped over the slope to land soft footed in front of the cabin. A brown figure rose from beside the snow-pits, raising both hands above his head.

"Don't shoot, Sukanabi!"

"White Calf!" Ted almost screamed with joy. "You again? I almost shot you. What are you doing here?"

"I came looking for my white brother," smiled the Indian.

"But—but how did you know where to find my hut?" asked Ted, as they clasped hands warmly.

"Have you forgotten so soon, my friend? You told me of

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your camp in the mountains, and made the picture on the ground."

"But what are you doing here? Where is your family?"

"Some of us got tired of doing nothing, so we decided to join our friends, the hunters, and come through the big rocks with them. I made my friends think it would be good sport. I knew you would be here. I have brought you gifts from my family."

"From your family!" cried Ted in alarm. "Do they know I am here?"

"Oh, yes. My father sends you his prayers for good hunting and promises that he will send you word as soon as peace has returned to our country. You see, Sukanabi, you and I are brothers, and nothing can change that. My father loves you as his own son. An Indian must stand by his own family, even though they are at war with each other." Ted blinked back tears of happiness as his friend spoke, and the two lads walked slowly down the hill to White Calf's house.

The pony was loaded with several large bundles, and the Stony lad unlashed them. They carried the loads back to the hut, where Ted could hardly keep still as the sacks were opened. First came food. A large bag of flour, a smaller one of salt, and one half filled with that precious dried leaf, tea. The very offering of this amount of tea proved the Indians' affection for Ted. But perhaps the most valuable item to him, at the moment, was the axe. It was an old one, to be sure, all covered with rust and lacking a handle, but with a little sand and stone and lots of elbow grease, it would soon shine like new. A handle was a simple thing to make. It was a small axe, like a tomahawk, and Ted recognized it as a voyageur's belt axe, like those he had seen in the north.

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Something else that made him blink was the little cloth bag that White Calf handed to him. It was heavy, and whatever was in it made dull clunks as he opened the bag. Ted gasped as he poured the contents out onto the ground. It was some kind of money, small coins much worn and smooth, but the most astonishing thing about them was the fact that they were undoubtedly solid gold. There were twenty of them in the bag. The white boy looked at his friend in astonishment. He had never seen this much money in all his life. He knew little about the value of gold, but the occasional gold-piece which came to the forts used to buy large quantities of supplies. There was a fortune right in this little bag.

"But - but - but White Calf these coins—this money——"

"I know, brother, they are the white men's gold. They were ah captured after the raid on the fort at Spitzee. The evil traders had hidden them in the walls."

"But they are very valuable. You could buy horses and guns and everything with them. You could be rich."

"No, Sukanabi. Some of my friends had some of these coins. They took them to the post at Benton. The white traders called my people thieves and murderers, and took the coins and drove my people from the fort. Gold is not good for the Indian. It is only for white people. My father gives it to you, for he knows that when you go back to your own people, you will be able to use it. There is much more of this gold in our village, but only used for beads and games."

Ted stared at the gold-pieces for some time, then slowly put them one by one back into the bag again.

"Men have been killed for less money than this," he said

quietly. "I think I shall hide it in my hut until it is time for me to leave the valley."

"A wise thought," nodded White Calf. "But see what my mother sends you. It is the handsomest of any in our band." He opened the last bag and shook out some kind of garment. Ted gasped again as it was spread before him. It was a buckskin jacket, so beautifully made that it might have been designed for some great chief. The front and back were entirely covered with the tiny glass beads, laid side by side in all kinds of patterns—flowers, birds, trees. All down the sleeves were rows and rows of dyed porcupine quills that rustled dryly as he brushed them. Every seam was hidden by long, rippling fringes. It was a soft, light coat, reaching below his waist, and fitted him as though it had been cut to measure. With his leggings and gloves, it made a very handsome costume indeed. White Calf gazed up at his white brother with great affection in his eyes. This boy was almost more Indian than he was white, he thought to himself.

When all the gifts had been shown, Ted took them into his hut and laid them carefully away. He spent the next hour showing the Indian all his camp and home, and they baked a couple of squirrels while they talked.

"I wished to bring you a pony," said White Calf, "but my father said that it would be very hard for you to look after a horse in these mountains in the winter-time."

"Yes, I guess it would be pretty hard," agreed Ted. "There isn't much grass around then."

"I have two horses of my own now," boasted the native lad, "and if you ever come to visit my family on the prairies, one of them will be yours."

"Oh, I wish I could come with you now!" cried Ted.

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"But I wouldn't want to cause any trouble for your band."

"You would be welcome in the band, but our other friends might be angry if you came with us just now. But sometimes we hunt very close to the big stone hills to the east, there. When we come close again, I will ride in to see you."

"That would be wonderful," exclaimed Ted as they walked down to the horse. "I'll be seeing you in the spring, then?"

"As soon as I can come," promised White Calf. "Now I must hurry. My friends will wonder what has happened to me and may come back to look."

He sprang lightly onto the pony's back and turned it toward the trail, raising his arm in farewell. Ted also raised an arm, and the fringes of the lovely coat fluttered in the breeze as he watched his friend go around the hill. For a long moment he looked at the trail, then at the coat he still wore even though the day was warm. Then he turned and padded happily back to his camp, ready to start a new life for another year in this beloved valley.

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

SOMETIME in the spring of 1870 Ted celebrated another birthday. He was now seventeen years old. It was hard to believe that two years could go by so swiftly. True, he had made several trips out of the hills, visiting the village of White Calf's people or spying on the traders at Spitzee. But for the most part he had spent the summers exploring his own kingdom, the mountains. Now, after wandering in the hills for this long, there was not much of the country he did not know. During the winter after White Calf first visited him, he had stayed close to his camp. The memory of that blizzard made him wary of all mountain weather.

He had lived well in those two years. The Indians gradually became quite friendly again, and he was able to enter their camps without fear. If the hot-headed youths from other bands knew of his being there, they held too much respect for him to make any attempt to hurt him. Through these natives Ted managed to trade a few skins for the things he really needed, powder and shot and caps and so on. And from them he got word of the white traders at Spitzer. He knew that all Spitzee Anota was a battle-ground. The traders continued to bring in their whiskey by the wagon load, and now they had even hired a score of hard-riding, hard-living desperadoes to protect their posts. They had several forts now. The new men were stationed at the big fort at Spitzee, and were known as the "Spitzee Police," for it was their duty to ride out to the relief of any

of the other posts that might be attacked by the angry natives.

Even though he was safe enough in the mountains, and in the camp of his Indian friends, Ted knew his life would not be worth much out on the prairies, so he felt it was wiser to stay where he was for a while. And anyway, he had made a promise that must be fulfilled. Through the months of his stay in the mountains, he had carried on some trading with the Indians, and he had agreed with White Calf's father to spend some time in trapping for furs. It was mostly for this purpose that he explored the surrounding hills so thoroughly. The lower parts of the valley around him were quite marshy, and almost overrun by beaver and muskrat. Their dams and lodges formed spiderwebs and islands all through the swampy flats, covering miles and miles of valley bottoms. The closest swamp was only two miles from his camp, and here he set out his first traps. The Indians had shown him how to set the traps, and how to skin his catch and stretch the pelts. Within a few weeks he became quite used to the work, and month by month his pile of skins grew higher and higher. As soon as he had collected enough skins to make a good pack, say about fifty pounds, which was about all he could carry, he would strap them on his back and walk out to find the Indians.

Sometimes he traded his pelts for ammunition or caps, but as much as possible he took his pay in the little gold coins which a few of the natives still had. The Indians were more than willing to make this kind of a deal, for the coins were only pretty ornaments to them. So it did not take many trades to collect all the gold in the camps, and Ted poured the money in his little bag with the rest, and hid the whole thing in his hut. With the last of the coins taken, he

then bargained for more ordinary things, moccasins, leggings, coats, and so on, until he was well supplied with clothing, powder and lead.

His life during these past two years had been good. Plenty of food and plenty of healthy activity had built him into a well-developed, keen-minded youth, and in his seventeenth year he felt completely at ease with the world. If, during the long winter months, he ever felt lonely, he put the thought from his mind by getting busy with something that needed doing.

The snow of winter was nearly all gone from his valley by now, and his little creek had started to run again. He spent a while in cleaning some muck from the little rock basin where he got his water. The task may have taken him an hour altogether, counting the trip up and back; but when he returned to his hut, the damage had been done. A quick glance was all that he needed to tell the story. His snow-pits, both of them, had been torn open! Every bit of his store of meat was gone!

He checked the whole camp, but nothing else had been taken. Then he examined the pits, finally deciding that the thief was a bear. Coming out of its winter sleep, the animal was no doubt hungry, and perhaps a little meat had been left too close to the surface of the snow, just enough to give off a smell that could be picked up by the bear's keen nose. A scraped spot of earth on the hillside showed him which way the beast had gone, so he tracked it as far as the trees before he gave up. The meat was gone and he could not get it back by hunting down the bear. He turned back to camp, satisfied that it had gone out of his country.

As he walked slowly back from the place it had gone into the trees, he came across a stream where the ground

around was quite soft and mucky. There in the mud was a paw-print. Ted had seen many bear tracks in his life in Canada, but this was one he would never forget. His two hands together, fingers spread wide, would not have covered the print. But what filled him with awe was the length of the slashes where its claws had sunk into the earth. As Ted watched, tiny trickles of water spilled into the print, slowly filling it, until it was a little round pool in the wet earth.

It wasn't until the next year that Ted had more trouble with the big bear. Spring had hardly settled over the land when the rander struck again. The boy had spent the day far up on his hill, hunting and shooting a fat young doe. Loaded down with his kill, he staggered into camp an hour before sundown. The first warning he had was the smell. As soon as he stepped into his camp he knew the bear was near, or had been, for there is nothing that smells quite like a bear. Ted dropped his burden and cocked the rifle, eyes and ears alert for the slightest sound or move. The bear had gone, and Ted saw that his pits were once again open and empty.

For the first time in his life Ted became angry at an animal. This trouble-maker would have to be taught a lesson! He stowed the body of the deer in his hut, blocked up the door in case the bear returned while he was away, and took up the trail. The bear had left a plain track through soft ground and wet snow, and Ted sped rapidly after it. In places where more than one bear track crossed a snow patch, he could easily tell the difference between the others and his own quarry. The one he followed made tracks as large as two feet of the others. When he came to a snow patch where he was not sure which trail was which, his

tracking wisdom came into play. With sensitive fingers he would feel gently around the edge of the track. If the snow was hard and icy beneath his touch, it would be the wrong print, for it would be an old one of a day or more. If the snow was still soft and rough, it was the right one and fresh, as it had not yet frozen on the surface. He caught up with the bear just before the sun went behind the peaks.

The bear had settled down under a big fallen tree, breathing heavily, for he had just eaten the greater part of an elk. Ted first caught sight of him by this loud snoring, and then the breeze brought him the bear scent again. He circled until he could look down the hill upon the sleeping brute. It was a grizzly, largest of the bear family.

For a full five minutes Ted stared, as the sun sank lower and the shadows began to creep higher up the hills. He was a little afraid to shoot for fear of only wounding the beast, but unless he killed it, it would only come back to bother him again. He raised the rifle and cocked it.

Ted stood up to get a better aim. At his movement, the bear raised his head to look squarely at the young hunter. Ted caught his breath sharply. Here was the largest animal he had ever seen. The great head was as big as that of a bull buffalo. The light was failing fast, so he had to make up his mind quickly. Even as he did so, the bear began to rise from his bed. Ted drew a bead on his head, just between the little red pig-eyes, and squeezed the trigger.

The bear was nearly on its feet when Ted fired. It was a good fifty yards downhill from the hunter, but the bullet struck its mark squarely, slamming with a thud on the huge skull. The bear sat back on his haunches with a loud *thwif* and the head dropped. The tiny eyes closed. Ted waited for a full minute, then took a step forward. But before he

could move any closer, the little eyes opened again; the huge head came up, shook two or three times, and a terrible roar rippled from the animal's throat.

Ted stood hypnotized as the stunned monster blinked and stared back at him. Then the boy snapped back to life. He turned and started to run up the hill, anywhere to get away from the terror that was behind him. As he darted uphill, he heard the snarl of rage as the brute charged after him. In deepening shadow, the frightened youth ran headlong upwards. He did not see where he was going, he didn't much care, so long as it was away from the bear. A sharp ledge of stone jutted out in front of him, forming a sort of small canyon in the hillside. He turned and ducked inside, racing blindly to the far end, hoping to gain time to get away from the bear. Ahead of him in the dusk was the end of the cleft, and it was a sheer wall, twelve feet high. The canyon was a dead end, and he was trapped!

Ted turned desperately, searching for some crack or flaw in the smooth face of the rock, some tiny step or fingerhold by which he could draw himself up out of the reach of the bear. There was none. Dropping his rifle he clawed frantically at the rock, tearing nails and hands, unheeding of the pain. Then, as he turned to look back down the cleft, he saw the huge bulk of the bear hesitating there. The way was closed!

He turned so that he faced his enemy, with his shivering back against the cold stone cliff. The grizzly sniffed at the entrance of the canyon, then picked up Ted's trail and moved slowly toward him. In the fading light the great bear advanced slowly down the narrow corridor of the canyon, and Ted could only stand motionless, frozen with fear. When the beast was about forty feet away, it stopped and

glared around, searching for its prey, and Ted could see where his bullet had struck, ploughing a great red furrow up the skull which streamed blood in a blinding curtain over the bear's face. Then the great head stopped swinging. It lowered a little, and the red eyes stared at Ted. In the moment of hesitation Ted turned to the wall in a last attempt to find some way up it, and in so doing stepped on his rifle. He picked it up and frantically started to reload it.

Even as he did so, the bear started toward him. Its coughing bellow echoed strangely in the canyon as the animal stood up on its hind legs. He gasped again as he stared at the towering form. It stood a good eight feet high, and as it waddled toward him, head forward, teeth bared and dripping, he could hardly bring up the weapon to his shoulder. He aimed the rifle with shaking hands, determined to do his best. At least now he had one chance to live. He knew that another shot at the head would do no good, so he aimed at the bear's neck, where it was thickest. The bear was no farther than twenty feet away when Ted fired.

The shot slammed like an explosion against the rock walls, and the bear stopped where he stood. For the barest moment he seemed almost ready to turn and run, but then the charge came. As Ted gripped the rifle by the barrel for his last desperate chance to use it as a club, the grizzly rushed forward, mouth wide in a terrible grin. Somehow it seemed to know that this was to be its last move, for Ted was just raising the rifle when the light in the little red eyes dimmed. The bear's feet stopped moving forward, and the huge body toppled slowly, like a great tree, and fell with a crash full length across the floor of the canyon, the murderous claws rattling on the stones not two feet from Ted's

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legs. The boy gazed down on this fallen monarch, and his eyes closed. He fell across the hairy paws.

When Ted came to his senses, he remembered only a little of his experience at first—just the horror of it. The release from the tension of battle made him sick, and it was quite a while before he felt well enough to start down the hill. But the valley was dark then, and he climbed back up to the dead bear, to stay by it all night so that coyotes and other animals would not bother it. He ate a little of the dried food in his pouch, and built a small fire near the entrance of the canyon. Then he lay on the cold rock and slept for a while, with his rifle, reloaded, beside him.

It took him nearly all the next morning to skin out the grizzly. He took only the skin and the claws, leaving the carcass for any scavenger that might care for it. In his mind he could see the fine robe or rug this skin would make, and he would give it to White Calf's father as a gift of friendship. The claws he would make into a necklace, for the Indians had told him that the greatest badge of bravery and might was just such a necklace.

With the bearskin on its way to becoming properly cured, Ted turned to the business of the claws. He polished and cleaned them carefully, one at a time, until they shone with a dull glow, and tiny stars sparkled from the needle points. Then with his knife he drilled a neat hole through the thick end of each claw. Strung on a fine white string of buckskin, with large bone beads to space them, the claws made a fine ornament, and he could just see the envy on the faces of his Indian friends. He tucked the necklace away until his next trip outside.

CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

Two weeks after the killing of the bear, White Calf rode into his friend's camp with the news that the Spizee Police were no more. The men had broken up into their own trading and hunting teams, and the whole country was filled with hunters. Somehow the buffalo had been replaced by the wolf as an important fur bearer. A new style in the Old Country had changed the market overnight. Every man on the prairies was hunting wolves. Ted had heard a few of the lone grey ones howling through the winter nights, but out on the plains they ran in great packs, and were being slaughtered by the hundred.

White Calf also brought news that many more white men were coming into the country. Posts had been built in dozens of places along the foothills, and trains of supply wagons travelled up and down the Benton-Edmonton road.

"Well, White Calf," sighed Ted, "looks like it's about time for me to be heading out."

"Yes, Sukanabi, I have been thinking so, and my heart is heavy. We have been very good friends, you and I. I shall always remember you."

"Oh, don't be so unhappy. I'm not gone yet, and anyway, I'll be coming back here to stay as soon as I find Father and René."

"I pray that you will find them, and that you will come back."

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"Well, I guess I'd better start packing. Did you bring a horse for me this time?"

"Yes, brother, I have a pony waiting for you down the hill. We can carry your gear down to it."

They packed up a few things that Ted wished to keep. He put on his leggings and the fine jacket he had been given and then, as White Calf watched in amazement, hung the glistening necklace of bear claws around his neck.

"Sukanabi!" the Indian cried, "you have killed the great bear? You have done this thing which only the mightiest of hunters can do? How did you do this wonderful thing?"

"Oh, it's quite a story," laughed Ted, and he told the whole tale, while his native brother listened spellbound. When the thick pelt was unrolled to its full length, White Calf was speechless with awe. And even when they rolled the hide and tied it on the back of the pony, the Indian youth could hardly believe it. But gradually, as they rode down the trail and out of the mountains, his wonder was replaced by admiration for this straight young white man. So for the rest of the journey to his family's camp, White Calf rode side by side with Ted, proud of his friend delighted at the stories he would tell to the other hunters as they sat around the fire.

White Calf's astonishment was no greater than his father's when Ted rode up to the tepee the next evening. The first thing the old Indian saw was the necklace, and when Ted presented him with the huge bearskin, his joy was unbounded. Every man, woman, and child in the camp was called in to see the trophy, and Ted was made the centre of attraction for many hours afterward. That single deed, the killing of the grizzly bear, made Ted one of the

best-known men on the plains. He was not aware of it, but that simple symbol of claws opened the whole Spitzee Anota to him. There was not an Indian, Stony or Blackfoot, in the whole territory who had not heard of his might and skill before the new moon. For two full days Ted stayed with the Indians, but at the end of that time he could no longer hold himself back. He traded his finest furs for a pony and headed down the Spitzee River.

Once again he thought back to the days he had spent creeping along this river to the mountains. It seemed so long ago now, and here he was returning in triumph. The horse he rode was another of those ragged and rugged little native ponies, but instead of the splotchy colouring, it was a sort of sand colour all over. The lad was still wearing his finest dress, even though the day was warm, and he would have preferred to go only in breechclout. The fringes on his leggings and jacket flapped and whipped in the breeze and the necklace jingled with a dry rustling as it scraped against the beadwork of his coat.

He had no fear of either Indian or white man. The dead weight of his pistol bounced comfortingly against his hip, for he wore it around his waist on a belt now, outside of the coat, and its wood butt stuck up out of the case. For the past few weeks he had practised regularly with it, and he seemed to have a natural talent for the big gun. His hands were bigger now, and his wrists stronger, and he could hold a bead on a target for five minutes without shaking. But with all his liking for the revolver, his rifle was still with him.

It lay in its sheath just under his left leg, and as he rode, its gleaming stock stuck up close to his hands, ready to be whipped out like a flash of lightning. No, Ted was not

afraid of man or beast as he rode down to Spitzer. He was a man, full eighteen years old, and although he was not tall, he was complete master of every muscle and bone in his brown body. Years in the mountains had taught him to move like a cat, quickly, smoothly, and silently.

White Calf went with him down to the island, for he, too, was well able to look after himself now, and had been out on more than one war party with his band. He rode proudly beside Ted, hoping that some of his people would come past so that they should see him in the company of this great white hunter with the grizzly claws around his neck and the great silver gun at his side. Together they rode down to Spitzer, and stopped on the north bank, looking down upon the island. For a full fifteen minutes they sat their ponies while Ted looked over the valley below. He searched every inch of the old river-bed, looking for sign of men, white or red. Then he turned toward the crossing and they rode silently down into the valley.

The trail was well beaten by now, with deep wheel ruts crisscrossing each other. They turned to follow the road. Once across the stream Ted was surprised to note that there were no tepees anywhere in sight.

"The bad traders have driven my people away," explained White Calf. "They camp farther out on the prairies where they can see if any enemies come to raid them. Sometimes the white men gather together in large bands and ride upon our villages."

"But aren't there enough of you to drive these bad men from your country?"

"We raid them many times each summer but they go away for a little while and then come back with more men and more new rifles."

"Aren't there any good white men left on the prairies?" asked Ted, as he drew his pony to a halt on the south bank.

"Oh yes, Sukanabi, but the bad traders shoot them and drive them away when they come. The bad traders would kill you, too, if they saw you out here alone."

"No!" smiled Ted, patting the butt of his pistol. "They might try, but they would have a hard time doing it now." He reined the pony back toward the river. Halting once again on the north bank, the two friends looked full into each other's eyes, not knowing what to say. They were parting now and neither knew how soon they would meet again.

"I guess this is good-bye for now, White Calf," said Ted as they shook hands sadly. "I wish you would come back to Edmonton with me."

"No, Sukanabi, I cannot go. You are my brother and I would gladly die with you if need be. But I must stay with my family. The white people are your people and I would not belong with them. Go to Fort Edmonton. It may be that you will find your father there. I pray that you will. And I shall meet you there sometime. But remember, my brother, if ever you return to the Spitzee Anota, I will welcome you again into my family. You will always be one of us."

"Thank you, White Calf. I'll be back, and soon, too. Take care of yourself!"

With these words the two youths turned and rode away.

Ted rode steadily northward for the rest of that day and camped at the crossing called Okotoka. With the food he carried in his pouch and the rabbits he shot along the trail, he had plenty to eat. When at last the great bushlands came

in sight, he felt a great longing to reach Edmonton as soon as possible. The fort offered him his only hope of news of his parents and Corteau, and he could hardly wait to get there. His sturdy little Indian pony carried him a good sixty miles in a day, travelling from sunup to sundown. So it was on the fifth day of his journey that he came out on the banks of the great Saskatchewan. He stood on the south bank, looking across to the fort. It was six years since last he had seen Edmonton and he could hardly recognize it. Although the post itself had not changed much, there were more houses in and around it, and people seemed to be everywhere.

His heart thrilled to see the red-white-and-blue flag waving proudly over the biggest house, and he rode down to the crossing, filled with a strange feeling of pride and homesickness. His coming aroused a flurry of excitement in the colony, for few white men came from the south these days, especially alone. Traders and agents flocked around him to ask dozens of questions about the situation on the prairies, and he spent nearly an hour answering them before he was able to break away. When finally, they allowed him to ride on down the street, he walked his pony to a long building and tied up at the rail there. He was about to enter the store when a voice hailed him from behind. He turned to see a man coming toward him across the yard. No doubt to ask more questions, he told himself.

"Please pardon my curiosity," the man said as he walked up to Ted, "but I have a very important question to ask you."

Ted's eyes popped wide open as he looked at the man. For a moment he could say nothing, and the other went on:

"I hear you have just come up through the Stony country. I wondered if you could give me any news of a white boy in the Spitzee River country."

"What was his name?" Ted's voice was barely a whisper.

"MacDonnell," stated the other, looking hopefully into the boy's eyes. Ted stood for some moments before he could speak. Then:

"Father! Don't you know me?"

MacDonnell gaped in astonishment at his son. Neither of the weatherbeaten, wind-browned men could find voice. Ted looked at his father with tears in his eyes and a set grin on his lips. Then the two were clasped tightly in each other's arms.

After the first shock had worn off, James stood back and looked at his son. The elder MacDonnell had not changed much save for the grey hair at his temples, and it seemed to Ted that they had never been separated. Ted was first to speak after their embrace.

"And what of Mother?" he asked quietly. "Have you had any definite word lately?" The question seemed to snap James from his thoughts and he put an arm across Ted's shoulders as he answered:

"Aye, lad, I've had word long since. She was picked up off the island called Newfoundland. Some fishermen took her to their village and kept her there until she could travel. Then they sent her on to Montreal. The Company sent her off to Winnipeg and looked after her while they got in touch with me through the fort here."

"Winnipeg! Where's that?"

"What they used to call Fort Garry. You remember?"

"Fort Garry! Why, that's a thousand miles from here. When do we ride out there to fetch her home?"

"We don't have to fetch her," the father smiled. "I went out and brought her back as soon as I heard from her. She's here in Edmonton now. And she'll be waiting for René and me to come for our tea. We'd best hurry along now."

Arm in arm the two moved off through the streets of the fort, the older man leaning ever so slightly on the buck-skinned arm of his son. In a small cabin under the wall of the stockade a happy woman was setting out three cups on the table—one for James, one for herself, and one for the small dark man who was changing clothes after helping to pull a foundered ox from the mud of the river bank.

"By gar!" grumbled Cortean under his breath, giving his moccasins a savage twist to wring the water from them. "For true dis feller Cortean he's not gone to heaven w'en he's die. De odder place she's too hot for be wet, I'm t'ink."



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